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PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



October 2012

Vol. 117, No. 10

THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *Divine Love – II*



THERE is one more human representation of the divine ideal of love. It is known as Madhura, sweet, and is the highest of all such representations. It is indeed based on the highest manifestation of love in this world, and this love is also the strongest known to man. In this sweet representation of divine love God is our husband. We are all women; there are no men in this world; there is but One man, and this is He, our Beloved. All that love which man gives to woman, or woman to man, has here to be given up to the Lord.

All the different kinds of love which we see in the world, and with which we are more or less playing merely, have God as the one goal; but unfortunately, man does not know the infinite ocean into which this mighty river of love is constantly flowing, and so, foolishly, he often tries to direct it to little dolls of human beings. The tremendous love for the child that is in human nature is not for the little doll of a child; if you bestow it blindly and exclusively on the child, you will suffer in consequence. But through such suffering will come the awakening by which you are sure to find out that the love which is in you, if it is given to any human being,

will sooner or later bring pain and sorrow as the result. Our love must, therefore, be given to the Highest One who never dies and never changes, to Him in the ocean of whose love there is neither ebb nor flow. Who in this universe is fitter to be loved than He? So let Him be the husband, let Him be the Beloved.

Aspire after that kiss of the Beloved, that touch of His lips which makes the Bhakta mad, which makes a man a god. To him, who has been blessed with such a kiss, the whole of nature changes, worlds vanish, suns and moons die out, and the universe itself melts away into that one infinite ocean of love. That is the perfection of the madness of love.

Ay, the true spiritual lover does not rest even there; even the love of husband and wife is not mad enough for him. The Bhaktas take up also the idea of illegitimate love, because it is so strong; the impropriety of it is not at all the thing they have in view. The nature of this love is such that the more obstructions there are for its free play, the more passionate it becomes.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 3.96.



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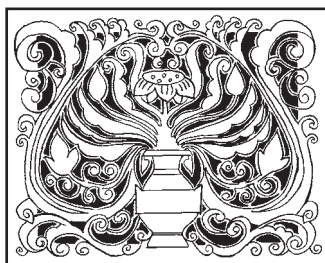
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उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत । *Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*



Employing Intelligence

October 2012
Vol. 117, No. 10

अवेक्ष्य विषये दोषं बुद्धियुक्तो विचक्षणः ।
कामापाशेन यो मुक्तः स मुक्तेः पथि गोचरः ॥

The person who is intelligent and wise and who knows what defects lie hidden in the objects [of enjoyment], knows how to free himself from the bonds of desire. Only such a person is fit to tread the path that leads to liberation.

(Sarva-Vedanta-Siddhanta-Sarasangraha, 61)

तं दुर्दर्शं गूढमनुप्रविष्टं गुहाहितं गह्वरेष्ठं पुराणम्
अध्यात्मयोगाधिगमेन देवं मत्वा धीरो हर्षशोकौ जहाति ॥

The intelligent man gives up happiness and sorrow by developing concentration of mind on the Atman and thereby meditating on the ancient Deity who is inscrutable, lodged inaccessibly, located in the intellect, and seated in the midst of misery.

(Katha Upanishad, 1.2.12)

एको वशी निष्क्रियाणां बहूनामेकं बीजं बहुधा यः करोति ।
तमात्मस्थं येऽनुपश्यन्ति धीरास्तेषां सुखं शाश्वतं नेतरेषाम् ॥

Everlasting happiness is for those, and not for others, who are wise and realize as seated in their intellect him who is one and independent, who makes diverse the single seed of the many actionless (beings).

(Shvetashvatara Upanishad, 6.12)

THIS MONTH

All life displays intelligence, which in the final analysis belongs to God. **Genuine Intelligence** is what takes us to our source.



Many streams of traditions have commingled in making Hinduism. Swami Brahmeshananda of Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Varanasi, writes on **Shramana Traditions: Their Contribution to Hinduism and Yoga**.

The inspiration and traditions behind the celebration of **Durga Puja at Belur Math** are unique. The spirit of this annual observance, together with its historicity, has been captured by Swami Vimalatmananda of Belur Math, a trustee of Ramakrishna Math.

Dr Sukanya Ray, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Lady Brabourne College, Kolkata, writes on the experiences of **Vivekananda in the US before the Parliament of Religions** and how Swamiji's subsequent mission was moulded by the events he had to face during this period.

Sabitabrata Ghosh, who teaches English at Prabhu Jagat Bandhu College, Howrah, is visually challenged. He touchingly writes about the physical and spiritual **Journey from Darkness to Light** many people go through.



The essence of spirituality consists in longing to realize the Truth. In **Seeking the Atman**, Swami Swanubhavananda of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Headquarters, deals with divine grace and how it develops that longing.



Religion never disappears, but changes its form. Dipak Sengupta, former Chief General Manager, Coal India Limited, narrates **The Death of an Old Religion** that was prevalent in Mexico.

In the second part of **Eternal Words** Swami Adbhutananda talks about the Holy Mother, faith, meditation, and renunciation. His conversations, compiled by Swami Siddhananda in *Sat Katha* and published by Udbodhan Office, are translated into English by Swami Sarvadevananda, Assistant Minister, Vedanta Society of Southern California.

The seventh instalment of **Svarajya Siddhi: Attaining Self-dominion** by the eighteenth century Gangadharendra Saraswati, fifteenth pontiff of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitham, Kanchipuram, deals with renunciation and the superiority of knowledge over actions.

Genuine Intelligence

THERE ARE MILLIONS of life forms and many more have yet to be discovered. They inhabit every environment on earth and range from the microscopic to the very large. All these life forms are locked in a constant struggle for survival and propagation. And in this engagement all life forms display astonishing intelligence. There was a time when humans were thought of as the only intelligent species, but it is now known that there is a vast range of intelligence among other species, each suited to its environment. Intelligence is not an isolated ability but a combination of perception, learning, memory, reason, and problem solving, or it could even be a selective process involving all these cognitive processes.

Most intelligence theories in science have evolved through a succession of previous psychological and biological theories. Present-day cognitive theories—concerning the structure of mental functions—are combined with ‘contextualism’, which is the study of interactions between the environment and mental processes; this of course involves studies concerning the neural bases of intelligence. Along with theories that try to measure intelligence, which has multiple classifications, the emotional as well as the spatial and semantic fields are now being seriously considered as intelligence. Intelligence is the calling card of all life, and in our daily interactions it is intelligence that principally describes our personalities. As life and the environment are dynamic, so is intelligence.

The senses are no doubt important for intelligence, but there are many species that do not have senses the way we know them, while other species

have hyper-senses. Human senses are very limited indeed. Among the visually impaired and other challenged people there is a remarkable display of intelligence and adaptation. Given more opportunities the ‘differently abled’ can exhibit even more intelligence than others. The other paradox is that of idiot savants who display unusual intelligence but have some mental disability. And compared to geniuses, most of us are idiots. The idea of intelligence as being dynamic and evolutionary has put much stress on static intelligence theories. If intelligence is due to the material structure, like the brain’s, there are also species that do not have the mammalian brain structures and still display intelligence. This also has become a conundrum, which is difficult to solve.


Sri Ramakrishna says a crow considers itself clever, but all the same it eats filth. Human intelligence is also employed in doing evil. If humans consider themselves very intelligent, why do they often act irrationally, brutally, fanatically? We intuitively know that intelligence and evil do not mix, yet they are found operating together. This is another contradiction that studies are unable to resolve coherently. Other intelligent life forms do not act with evil intents, only humans do. One reaps what one sows. Indian philosophical systems speak of the mind as the repository of the actions and reactions of one’s own karma. This implies that intelligence is subject to the law of karma and rebirth. It is also now understood that disease, grief, bad habits, restlessness vitiate intelligence.

The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* says that when the gods decided to overcome the demons,

they decided to perform the Jyotishtoma sacrifice. Each human faculty was asked to chant the mantras. They did so, but the asuras charged them with evil; that is why we see, hear, speak, and think evil. The Puranas teach this idea through the story of the asuras being destroyed by the Divine Mother Durga, who is created by the combined power of all the gods. She destroys Mahishasura and frees the gods, who once again attain their divine status. In other words, sadhana, penances, austerities, good work, prayers, and unselfishness, which are classed as various yoga disciplines, purify the intellect from evil karmas, enabling individuals to comprehend higher eternal verities.

All forms of intelligence have a source. However, scientifically speaking, saying that ‘anything does not come out from nothing’ may be misleading, because for science the whole universe has come from ‘nothing’. But what science calls ‘nothing’, actually means ‘everything’, the ground of all creation, preservation, and destruction that teems with possibilities and potentialities. Where does the intelligence that we see displayed in various forms come from? It would be metaphysically better if we rather say that intelligence takes many life forms. If one wants to study all the grains of sand of the world, one has to study a sample of sand grains and intelligently connect it with the knowledge of all kinds of sand. Looking deeper we find that we follow this method because this is the way our minds are structured. Similarly, in order to understand the universal display of intelligence we need to study just one life-form. Vedanta simplifies the quest and answers most queries about intelligence, besides divinizing life, by saying that the universal intelligence is God. It is God who evolves as the infinite variety of intelligence found in the world. The concept of evolution has its counterpart in involution. The tree is the seed evolved; the seed is the tree involved. To describe

this concept in the words of Swami Vivekananda: ‘The whole series of evolution beginning with the lowest manifestation of life and reaching up to the highest, the most perfect man, must have been the involution of something else. The question is: The involution of what? What was involved? God. ... We know that if we can find the beginning we can find the end. *E converso*, if we find the end we can find the beginning. If that is so, take this whole evolutionary series, from the protoplasm at one end to the perfect man at the other, and this whole series is one life. In the end we find the perfect man, so in the beginning it must have been the same. Therefore, the protoplasm was the involution of the highest intelligence. You may not see it but that involved intelligence is what is uncoiling itself until it becomes manifested in the most perfect man.’ Sri Ramakrishna says: ‘He [God] alone has become mind, life, and intelligence. We are only His instruments.’

We see the world as matter, and that makes intelligence material. If we can see the world as God in his dynamic aspect, our intelligence would become spiritualized. Sri Ramakrishna says: ‘Shivānath once said that one “loses one’s head” by thinking too much of God. “What?” said I. “Can anyone ever become unconscious by thinking of Consciousness? God is of the nature of Eternity, Purity, and Consciousness. Through His Consciousness one becomes conscious of everything; through His Intelligence the whole world appears intelligent.”’ Real intelligence is that which seeks to attain God. As a stream, following its nature, runs towards the ocean, so also every form of intelligence runs towards God, for that is its nature, however thwarted and diverted by repeated mistakes it may be. Speaking of the culmination of human intelligence Sri Ramakrishna says: ‘When a man merges his *buddhi*, intelligence, in *Bodha*, Consciousness, he attains the Knowledge of Brahman, becomes *buddha*, enlightened.’ 

Shramana Traditions: Their Contribution to Hinduism and Yoga

Swami Brahmeshananda

ALL THE DIFFERENT RIVERS of Indian beliefs, concepts, practices, and philosophies mingle their waters in the ocean of modern Hinduism and have the Vedas as their source. Swami Vivekananda says: “The seeds of the multifarious growth of Indian thought on religion lie buried in the Vedas. Buddhism and the rest of India’s religious thought are the outcome of the unfolding and expansion of those seeds, and modern Hinduism also is only their developed and matured form. With the expansion or the contraction of society, those seeds lie more or less expanded at one place or more or less contracted at another.”¹ From this ancient Vedic source arose a major tradition of Indian culture; its philosophy is broadly classified into two groups: orthodox and unorthodox, also called Vedic and shramanic or brahmanic and non-brahmanic.

Shramana Culture

‘Buddhist literature appears to speak of all the non-Brāhmaṇic systems as Śramaṇa as in the frequent expression “*samaṇā vā brāhmaṇā vā*”.’² There were many shramana sects and each group branched into several sub-streams. The various sects, however, had some common features:

- (1) They challenged the authority of the Vedas.
- (2) They admitted into their Church all members of the community, irrespective of their social ranks and religious career (*varṇa* and *āśrama*).
- (3) They observed a set of ethical principles.
- (4) They practised a detached life with a view to

liberating themselves from the worldly life etc. (5) They could take to a life of renunciation (*pravrajya*) any time after passing over the minor age (1389–90).

Other important features that marked the shramana sects were the various practices of esoteric yoga, the different kinds of tapasyas, and the deliberations on karma and samsara. Swamiji says: ‘At a certain period of Indian history, this one subject of man and his mind absorbed all their interest. And it was so enticing, because it seemed the easiest way to achieve their ends. ... Charms, magic, and other powers, and all that were nothing extraordinary, but a regularly taught science.’³ The Upanishads deal with *brahmavidya*, knowledge of Brahman, and in the ten principal ones—mainly in the *Katha*, *Mundaka*, and *Shvetashvatara*—there are brief references to yoga. In minor and sectarian Upanishads, many of which belong to a much later period, *brahmavidya* is found encased in yoga practices and other features of the shramana tradition. Later the various shramana traditions gave rise to Buddhism and Jainism, the two foremost sects that represented the culture of that time. Other minor sects never produced their own literature, though their existence and their tenets are known through references found in Buddhist and Jain literature.⁴

Most of the shramana sects were called by the generic word *parivrajakas*, wanderers. It is inferred that the shramana movement ‘was post-Vedic, from the complete absence of any

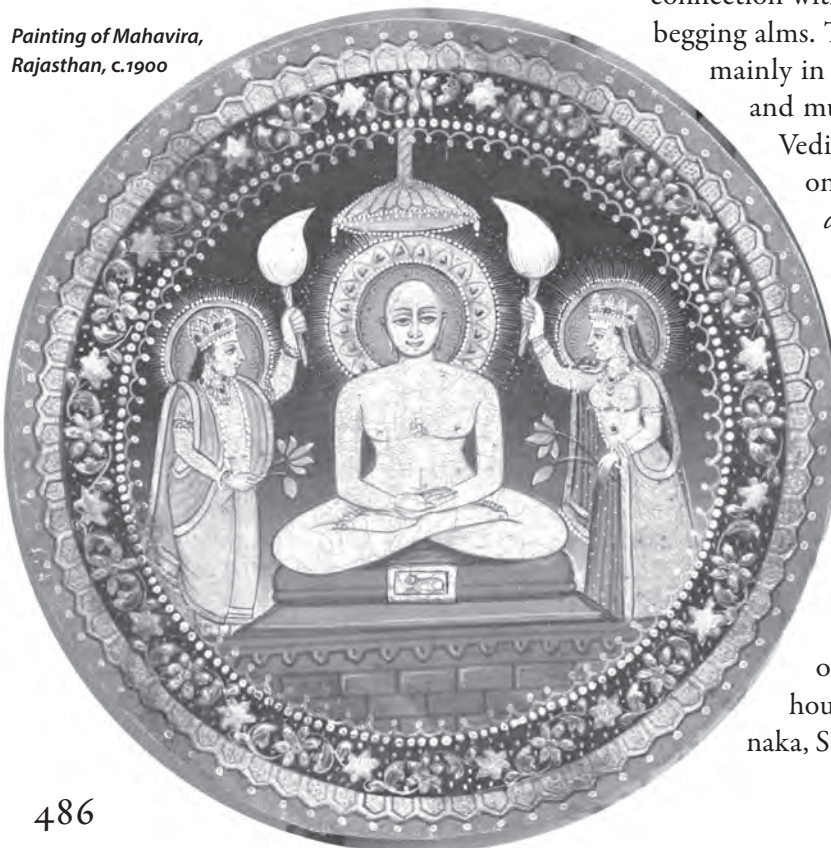
allusion to it in the Vedic hymns.⁵ By the sixth century CE the traditions of shramana monasticism flourished in many parts of eastern India. For this reason they were also known as Magadhana culture, derived from the kingdom of Magadha, today's province of Bihar. Bihar itself has come from the shramana word 'vihara', which means a Buddhist temple or monastery. Initially there were no creedal or other distinctions in the community, but later 'when differences of creeds and systems became more clearly defined the "wanderers" of each religion had their own body of practices, rules, and regulations, disciplinary and organizational' (2.583). Apart from the general word *parivrajaka*, words like *muni*, one who takes the vow of silence, *yati*, the controlled, 'shramana', 'sannyasi', and 'bhikshu' were also current. Vedic culture favoured the home and society in which one could practise the rituals prescribed by the Vedas, and

the ideal person was the brahmana marked by spiritual qualities and culture. Shramana culture emphasized 'homelessness' and was marked by *shrama*, toil, for spiritual life.

The Vedas deal, broadly speaking, with three disciplines: karma, upasana, and jnana. It is from these disciplines that yoga originated. Various yajnas and other elaborate rituals fall in the category of karma. Mental activities relating to Saguna Brahman, such as are described in the different *vidyas*, meditations, in the Upanishads are called upasana. Jnana, metaphysical knowledge, and the disciplines of discernment between the real and the unreal, as well as the realization of Truth are integral to Vedic literature. However, the later elaboration and crystallization of yogic principles and practices are due to shramana traditions.

Shramana ascetics spent their time practising yoga, austerities, and living ethical lives. The only connection with society they retained was for begging alms. These wandering ascetics dwelt mainly in forests, mountains, and caves, and much later in communities. The Vedic culture sets the ideal of a rishi, one who is omniscient, a *mantra-drashtha*, seer of mantras, and a *jivanmukta*, liberated while still alive. In the scriptures there are a large number of references to rishis who were householders—like King Janaka, Yajnavalkya, Vashishtha, and many others; they were the originators of several metaphysical teachings that are still followed to the present day. Even enquirers of Self-knowledge were mostly householders—like Maitreyi, Shaunaka, Satyakama, and so on.

Painting of Mahavira,
Rajasthan, c.1900



Shramana tradition, on the other hand, eschewed marriage and considered formal *sannyasa*, renunciation of all possessions, desires, and activities as essential for attaining liberation. An *arhat* is one who has gained perfect control over all his mental and physical activities and is the shramana ideal. The seekers too were monks, and one finds that most of Buddha's teachings in the *Tripitakas* were given to the *bhikshus*. The Jain prophet Mahavira too preached to Indrabhuti Gautama, his monastic disciple.

Vedic culture thoroughly accepts the concept of 'being', the shramana culture is wedded to 'becoming'; the former is *atmavada*, believing in the doctrine of the Atman, the latter, especially Buddhism, is *an-atmavada*. Some shramana sects believed in God, others were atheists, sceptics, and materialists, while some other sects like the Jains preached severe asceticism. Worship of God was generally replaced by the worship of an *arhat*, called Buddha in Buddhism and Tirthankara or Jina in Jainism.

The institution of *sannyāsa*, however, went against the grain of the socio-religious culture which the Aryan founders of Indian civilization had sought to develop and stabilize. In both Pali and Sanskrit literature, there are clear indications that the system which western scholars have called *Brāhmaṇism*, was at odds with the institution of 'homelessness', termed *Śramaṇism*. But the latter seems to have enjoyed great popular esteem, and the *Brāhmaṇical* sages who elaborated later the theory of life in four stages (*āśramas*) admitted 'homelessness' as the fourth or last condition of life, but their preference was always for the condition of the householder, which was the second stage (2.583).

Vedic tradition stressed *dharma*, shramana culture emphasized *moksha*.

Commingling of Traditions

Actually 'shramana' is a Vedic word that can be traced to the Yajur Veda's *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad*: '*Shramano'shramanah tapaso'tapasah*'; a monk no monk, an ascetic no ascetic.⁶ Though both Vedic and shramanic traditions flourished and maintained their original inspirations and practices, Vedic traditions kept absorbing the best shramanic principles. This absorption not only enriched the Vedic tradition but also made many of its own principles practical, while removing some things that were outdated and outmoded. In various yoga and *sannyasa* Upanishads there are clear signs of this assimilation. This process of absorption involved the reformation of Vedic life and ideals in a positive way. Besides, most of the smaller sects were either reabsorbed into Vedic religions or were merged in the larger Buddhist and Jain movements.

One of the best examples of this assimilation of various creeds, practices, beliefs, and philosophies is found in the *Bhagavadgita*. Swamiji says:

Wherein lies the originality of the Gita which distinguishes it from all preceding scriptures? It is this: Though before its advent, Yoga, Jnana, Bhakti, etc. had each its strong adherents, they all quarrelled among themselves, each claiming superiority for his own chosen path; no one ever tried to seek for reconciliation among these different paths. It was the author of the Gita who for the first time tried to harmonise these. He took the best from what all the sects then existing had to offer and threaded them in the Gita.⁷

Bhagavan Sri Krishna not only harmonized the various sects but also remodelled the old Vedic rituals and practices, giving them a new direction. While the word 'yoga' occurs only occasionally in the principal Upanishads, Sri Krishna uses it frequently in the Gita. In fact, the Gita is called an Upanishad, *brahmavidya*,

and a yoga-shastra. This is a clear attempt at reconciling all sects, along with the ingenious use of the word 'yoga', suitable to the Vedic ideal of the brahmana and of the *jivanmukta*. Yoga in the Gita is not just a path but also the goal. The root *yuj* means 'to join', as in the English word 'yoke'. It is the joining of the jiva with the Supreme.

Each of the eighteen chapters of the Gita is called a yoga, starting with 'Arjuna Vishada Yoga', the yoga of Arjuna's despondency. Interestingly and significantly, the confusion and despondency of Arjuna too is considered a yoga, because in such a period of mental confusion, crisis, and depression he turned to the Lord for help. One can thus convert every event—pleasant or unpleasant—into yoga, as a means of achieving union with the Lord. This also means that there could be innumerable paths to establish union with God, not merely the eighteen mentioned in the Gita. Nonetheless, clear-cut definitions of yoga are given in this scripture, such as, '*Samatvam yoga uchyate*; equanimity is called yoga.'⁸ This mental equipoise is the central theme of the Gita and has been emphasized several times. The second definition is: '*Yogah karmasu kaushalam*; yoga is skilfulness in action' (2.50). The third definition given is the title of the sixth chapter: 'Atma-samyama-yoga', the yoga of self-discipline, which deals with the control of mind—in the sense used by Patanjali in his *Yoga Sutra*. Yoga is also defined in the same chapter thus: '*Duhkha-samyoga-viyogam yoga-sanjnitam*; severance of contact with sorrow is called yoga' (6.23). This kind of definition is also found in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* and in Buddhist literature. One must keep in mind that Patanjali, while composing the *Yoga Sutra*, compiled various shramana yoga practices of various sects. Buddha too, through his great personality, absorbed many shramana sects, which later formed part of the Buddhist tradition.

There is also a difference in the meaning of the word 'tapas' in the *Yoga Sutra* and the Gita. Vyasa, in his commentary on the *Yoga Sutra*, explains 'tapas' as *titiksha*, forbearance, and severe physical hardship like *chandrayana*, in which fasting is done in accordance with the waxing and waning of the moon. Jainism also accepts this meaning of 'tapas', which seems to be the original shramana concept. However, Sri Krishna expressly decries such a practice as *asuri*, demonic. His definition of the three types of tapas—physical, verbal, and mental—is rational and entirely different. In this way, not only monks and ascetics but householders too can practise the teachings of the Gita. We thus find a marvellous attempt at interpreting and assimilating into the main Vedic stream yoga as presented in the shramana culture—though Vedic tradition always supported the supremacy of karma, jnana, and bhakti. It may also be mentioned that in this great synthesis Sri Krishna has given newer and wider interpretations of karma and yajna by converting them into yoga.

In the shramana culture emphasis is laid on how to transcend suffering. Buddha's Four Noble Truths deal with the inevitability of suffering, its cause, the possibility of its destruction, and the means of going beyond suffering. Interestingly, almost the same four teachings are mentioned in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*: '*Heyam duhkhamanagatam*; the suffering that has not yet manifested is to be removed'; '*Drashtri-drishyayoh samyogo heyahetuh*; the cause of that which is to be avoided is the junction of the seer and the seen'; '*Tasya heturavidya*; ignorance is its cause'; '*Tad-abhavat samyog-abhavo hanam tad-drishheh kaivalyam*; there being absence of that ignorance there is absence of the junction, which is the thing to be avoided, that is the *kaivalya*, independence, of the seer.'⁹ This destruction of suffering and attainment of liberation is achieved by the continuous flow

of higher knowledge, called *viveka-khyati* (2.26). Among the discussions on suffering in the Upanishads, remarkable is the instance in the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, where Narada laments before the sage Sanatkumara that in spite of so much learning, he has not transcended suffering.¹⁰

Unlike shramana literature, Vedic metaphysics, presented mainly by the Upanishads, dwells on the positive aspect of life. All through Vedic literature one finds highlighted the higher aspects of reality rather than individual pain and suffering. The conquest of death and attainment of immortality is a joyful and disciplined quest, achieved mainly through knowledge. A person is gradually led to the highest experience possible. The penultimate experience is the universality of Saguna Brahman, and the final experience occurs when all is transcended through the experience of Nirguna Brahman. Brahman is described as Satchidananda, absolute existence, knowledge, and bliss. In jnana yoga it does not matter if the mind is arrested in samadhi or disturbed as in the ordinary state of consciousness. What matters is that one has to 'de-identify' with the mind, which is unreal, and 'identify' with the Real, which is Brahman. One's separate individuality is relative and *mithya*, ultimately illusory. The knowledge of Brahman can arise by just hearing the *mahavakyas*, great sayings of the Upanishads.

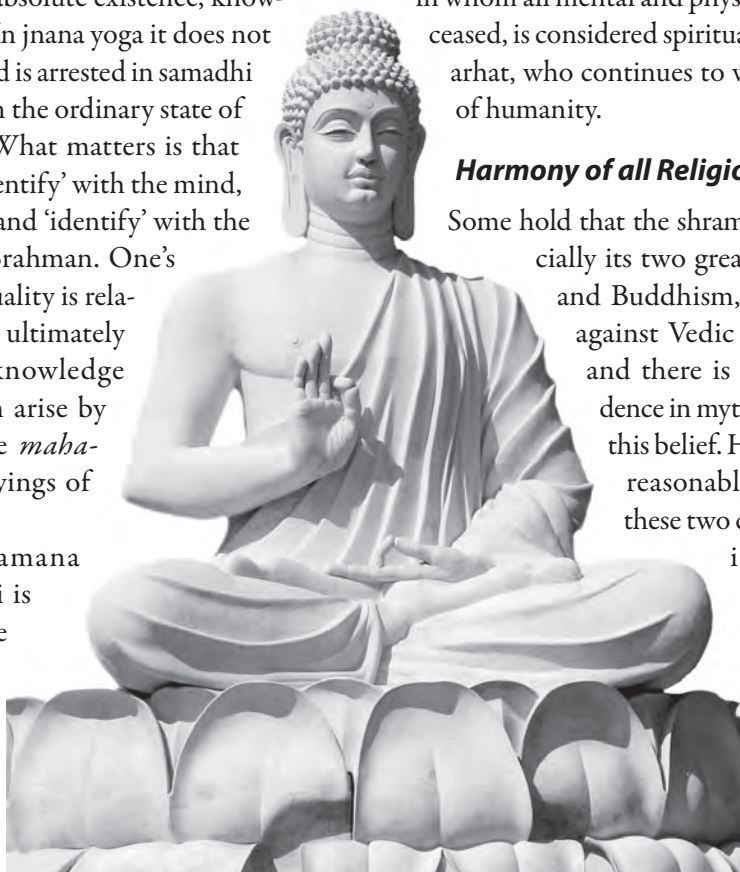
In the shramana culture samadhi is considered the goal of all spiritual practices and is of various types. The

highest samadhi is *nirbija*, seedless, in which not only the thought-waves on the surface of the mind are completely controlled, but even the deep samskaras are completely erased. If the yogi continues in this state for more than twenty-one days, as Sri Ramakrishna says, the body falls off and the jivatman, individual soul, merges in the Paramatman, Supreme Soul. Later Vedanta and other schools accepted the various stages of yoga as preparatory for the proper practice of Vedanta.

No single school of thought can claim the discovery of ethics, as ethics are universal and part of the human psyche. That is why one finds ethics common among the various shramana sects and the Vedic tradition as well. Both schools adapted ethics according to their goals. The Vedic concept of *jivanmukti* is also found in Buddha's life and teachings. In Jainism a siddha, in whom all mental and physical activities have ceased, is considered spiritually higher than an arhat, who continues to work for the good of humanity.

Harmony of all Religions


Some hold that the shramana culture, especially its two great streams Jainism and Buddhism, arose as a revolt against Vedic animal sacrifices, and there is considerable evidence in mythology supporting this belief. However, it is more reasonable to believe that these two cultures flourished independently and assimilated ideas and values from each other through a peaceful interaction. Almost all the



shramana sects had recruits from the Vedic traditions. There were many brahmanas among the followers of the shramana traditions and some of them, dissatisfied with rituals and prayers, took up the life of the *parivrajya*; they even produced well known saints.¹¹ The aim of both orthodox and unorthodox systems was the attainment of higher states of consciousness.

With the absence of any central authority to enforce doctrines, Indian people were free to choose their own path to salvation. When there was a major deviation from established practices, a new sect that deviated from the main Vedic stream was spontaneously formed. As one sect became dominant, it sooner or later fragmented into many sub-sects, and the fragments were then absorbed by others. Such fragmentation and coalescing of sects is a continuous process in the major world religions that have originated in India. Most of the minor shramana sects were absorbed within Buddhism and Jainism. The Vedic religious culture also absorbed some of the shramana sects. The whole process of assimilation was never consciously done, but the first great attempt was undertaken by Sri Krishna through the Gita. Swamiji says: 'But even where Krishna failed to show a complete reconciliation (Samanvaya) among these warring sects, it was fully accomplished by Ramakrishna Paramahansa in this nineteenth century.'¹²

The world, through technology, is coming closer each day. This universal interaction is shaping a new type of consciousness in humankind. Such a sense of unification of societies, people, and traditions needs yet another adjustment at the level of religious thought. Religion has become more important and relevant in people's lives than ever before, but the old ideas of religion need to be melded and made modern for a new harmony. This great work was

accomplished by Sri Ramakrishna. He not only preached the harmony of religions but lived it. Moreover, he went through all the moods and experiences of various religious sects of the past and showed their essential unity. He demonstrated their essential unity and also harmonised religion with life, reason, arts, and the sciences and thus gave a comprehensive philosophy of life. Swamiji says in a stirring language: 'The most compassionate divine Lord has manifested Himself far more fully in this modern age, in the aforesaid form of the incarnation of the age, than He ever assumed in any age, playing as He has done on the entire gamut of all the spiritual moods and experiences and utilizing to the utmost all arts and sciences.'¹³ 

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Durga Puja at Belur Math

Swami Vimalatmananda

MOTHER DURGA, the inaccessible; this awesome goddess is the consort of Shiva and the daughter of the Himalaya or Himavat. Durga has other names such as Uma, Parvati, Bhagavati, and Devi; she is one of the principal goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. One of the earliest references to her is found in the 'Devi Suktam' of the Rig Veda. The famous 'Durga Suktam' is found in the *Taittiriya Aranyaka* of the Yajur Veda. These hymns and other references to her, such as those found in the *Kena Upanishad* of the Sama Veda, are the ancient sources on which is based the concept of Durga that later manifests in the Itihasas and Puranas. Before Sri Rama destroyed Ravana and his demon hordes, he first worshipped Durga; emboldened by her grace and power he undertook the war. The Mahabharata is replete with references to her worship: the Pandava brothers worshipped Durga while living incognito during their exile. At the commencement of the Kurukshetra War Arjuna worshipped Durga at the instance of Sri Krishna. It was only after the goddess assured Arjuna of victory that he became ready for the battle.

Mother Worship

Mother worship was prevalent in most of the ancient civilizations of the world, especially in Asia and Europe. The worship of the great Mother Goddess should not be associated with rites of fertility or earth goddess cults, which were found in all cultures. The Mother Goddess is the parent of not only gods but humans and all life as well. In many of her aspects she is associated with mountains and has a lion as her vehicle. 'Festivals

honouring mothers and mother goddesses date back to ancient times. The Phrygians held a festival for Cybele, the Great Mother of the Gods, as did the Greeks for the goddess Rhea. Likewise, the Romans adapted the practice to their own pantheon. Some countries have continued to observe ancient festivals; for example, Durgapuja, honouring the goddess Durga, remains an important festival in India.'¹

After the various gods failed to kill the evil Mahishasura, who had the form of a buffalo, Durga was created to destroy him. Durga is said to be the derivative of the gods' collective powers and also the true source of all power. Durga presents a beautiful, motherly, and fierce form. She is depicted riding a lion and has eight or ten hands that hold various weapons, given by the various gods to defeat Mahishasura. In many parts of North India, Durga is shown riding a tiger. Durga has sixty-four forms, some terrible and others benign, and she is worshipped all over India in her diverse forms. In South India 'she is worshipped more in her fierce and terrible forms. Devī in her gentle aspects and moods assumes the forms of Kanyā, Kāmākṣī and Mūkāmbā. In Kerala the Devī is called Bhagavatī also, in Andhra [Pradesh] Jokulāmbikā and in Tamilnadu, Kaṇṇakī.'² Some of her popular names are: Aryadurga, Veda-garbha, Ambika, Bhadrakali, and Bhadra.

Asia Minor shows a remarkable continuity in its Mother worship. For 6,000 years, starting from the Neolithic Period, the population has venerated a divine pair, mother goddess and weather god, the former in association with the lion, the latter with the bull; a divine son, associated with

the panther; and a god of hunting whose symbolic animal was the stag.³ The cult of Cybele started in Asia. Her statue was worshipped in the open air amid great devotion and celebration. Cybele was the goddess of the mountains, out of which she was believed to manifest herself to her devotees. 'Representations of the goddess show her in her niche, sometimes flanked by lions, draped in a long garment and wearing a high polos (cylindrical crown or headdress) or with bared breasts and flanked by musicians. Her name and her association with the lion cannot be separated from the Hittite Kubaba, whose cult had spread from Carchemish to the borders of Phrygia' (ibid.).

The scriptural basis of the Durga Puja is the *Durga Saptashati*, also called the *Devi Mahatmyam* or *Chandi*, found in the *Markandeya Purana*; in it the Devi is depicted fighting Mahishasura in all her fury. The modern Durga Puja is a melting pot not just of the religious worship of the Divine Mother but also of cultural and social streams, besides nature worship. The worship is also called the *sharadiya* because it falls in September-October in the Indian month of *sharat*, autumn. During the puja Shiva is worshipped along with Durga's offspring: the goddesses Saraswati and Lakshmi and the gods Ganesha and Kartikeya. In other parts of India the Navaratri, nine nights, are celebrated by dramatic performances of the Ramayana, culminating on the Dussehra, tenth night, with the killing of Ravana by Sri Rama. In the Durga Puja this tenth day is called *vijaya dashami* and during this day the image of Durga is ceremonially immersed in a pond, or a river, or the ocean.

Celebrations in Belur Math

In one of his letters to Maharaja Ajit Singh of Khetri, Swami Vivekananda writes: 'For the last ten years or so I have not seen the Puja of Shri Durga in Bengal which is the great affair there.

I hope to be present.'⁴ One day in October 1901, on his return to the Math by boat from Calcutta, where he had gone for some work, Swamiji asked Swami Brahmananda to organize the Durga Puja at the Math in a *pratima*, image. Swamiji 'told him of the vision that he had had. He had seen the Durga Puja being celebrated at the Math, and the Mother being worshipped in a Pratima. On hearing this, Swami Brahmananda told the swami of his own vision.'⁵ It so happened that four or five days before, while sitting in the Math compound facing the Ganga, Brahmananda had a vision. 'He saw Mother Durga come over the Ganga from the Dakshineswar side and stop near the Bilva tree in the Math compound. The news of these visions created a great stir in the Math' (ibid.). The Bilva tree stood near what is now Swami Vivekananda's temple. Brahmachari Krishnalal was immediately sent to Calcutta to look for an image. Fortunately, a *pratima* was available, since the customer who had ordered it failed to collect it. Swamiji and Swami Premananda went to Calcutta to request the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's permission about certain observances connected with the puja. Holy Mother was then staying at 16A Bosepara Lane, Baghbazar. 'Mother gave her approval; so the Swami at once ordered the image to be brought, and returned to the Math' (2.606).

The news quickly spread and many devotees of Sri Ramakrishna came to the Math and joined the sannyasins in the celebrations. In order to perform the puja flawlessly Swamiji went through the *Raghunandana Smriti*, which deals in detail with ceremonial forms of worship of several gods and goddesses, including Durga. Many years ago at the Baranagar Math, when the disciples of the Master were unknown and penniless, Swamiji had initiated the worship of Durga in a *ghata*, consecrated pitcher. This would be the first time the worship of Durga in an image

would be celebrated by them, sannyasins of a new monastic organization. Apart from the vision of the Divine Mother, the other reason was that many orthodox brahmanas and pundits of the neighbourhood used to criticize Swamiji and the other monks for their liberal ideas, food habits, and modes of work, which for them were not in accord with the traditional scriptural customs. This celebration would remove all doubts and scepticism from the orthodox people's minds.

The Holy Mother was the supreme authority of the nascent Ramakrishna Sangha. She agreed to be present during the puja following the earnest prayers of Swamiji and all her other children. Holy Mother would stay with some women devotees for five days—from 18 to 22 October 1901. The nearby house of Nilambar Mukherjee was rented for their accommodation. When the Holy Mother saw all the arrangements, she was highly pleased and blessed all by saying 'Mother Durga will come here every year'. Invitations were sent to all the local brahmanas to attend the celebration.

A temporary structure was erected at the northern part of the lawn. The beautifully decorated *pratima* was brought and installed on the *shashthi*, sixth day. With Holy Mother's permission Brahmachari Krishnalal took the pujari's seat and Ishvarchandra Bhattacharya, Swami Ramakrishnananda's father, became the *tantra-dharaka*, director of the worship. Since Durga is a Vedic goddess, only a brahmachari can perform her puja, not a sannyasin. Before beginning any puja a *sankalpa*, vow, must be made. 'The worship was performed in the name of Holy Mother; for Swami Vivekananda declared, "We are all penniless beggars; the worship can't be in our names."⁶ Hence, the *sankalpa* mantra was uttered in the name of the Holy Mother. Even today, in all ritualistic worship performed in any centre of the Ramakrishna Order the *sankalpa* is uttered in the

name of the Holy Mother. Later, all the mantras for puja were systematized by Ramakrishnananda, who was an expert in this regard, and those mantras are meticulously followed even today.

Swamiji wanted to sacrifice an animal on the *navami*, ninth day, but the Holy Mother ordered that no animal sacrifice should be performed. This was a far-reaching insight on her part, and it is still maintained today. The Holy Mother's presence on that occasion was deeply significant and had a great impact on the celebration. In 1894 Swamiji wrote to Swami Shivananda from the US: 'You have not yet understood the wonderful significance of Mother's life—none of you. But gradually you will know. Without Shakti (Power) there is no regeneration for the world. Why is it that our country is the weakest and the most backward of all countries?—Because Shakti is held in dishonour there. Mother has been born to revive that wonderful Shakti in India.'⁷ He further writes: 'Baburam's [Premananda's] mother must have lost her sense owing to old age and that is why she is about to worship Durga in the earthen image, ignoring the living one [Holy Mother]. ... Brother, I shall show how to worship the living Durga and then only shall I be worthy of my name' (7.485). Knowing that Durga is palpably present in the Holy Mother, Swamiji wished, through the performance of the Durga Puja at Belur Math, to awaken the Divine Mother in all women.

During the worship the sannyasins and brahmacharis sang traditional songs associated with the Divine Mother. On the night of the *saptami*, seventh day, Swamiji suffered from fever, which prevented him from joining the celebrations. On the *ashtami*, eighth day, which is also the second day of the puja, he slowly rose and came down to attend the *sandhi puja*, the most important and solemn function of the whole celebration, and made offerings of flowers. On the *navami*



Kumari Puja
at Belur Math

he was well, and at night sang a few songs to the Divine Mother that Sri Ramakrishna used to sing on such occasions. Following Swamiji's intention, the sublime songs, sung in traditional tunes every year during the Durga Puja at Belur Math, create a soul-enthralling ambience.

Each day the poor were fed sumptuously, and this tradition is still followed. The orthodox people who attended that first celebration were delighted at the meticulous arrangements and soon their animosity dissipated. They were now convinced that the Math was run on traditional monastic lines. The *ashtami* is very popular because of the Kumari Puja, which Swamiji introduced. Kumari Puja is now an integral part of the Durga Puja at Belur Math. This puja has a great significance for modern times, as it elevates the idea of womanhood. Sri Ramakrishna says: 'Why do people worship virgins? All women are so many forms of the Divine Mother.'⁸ Swamiji says that the idea of a woman in India is that of a mother, not that of a wife, and if women are elevated, the whole society is elevated.

During the Puranic times Vedic yajnas were largely replaced by image worship and bhakti. Yet

all modern pujas can be traced to Vedic yajnas, because most of the mantras and other observances are Vedic in character. Royal rites like the Rajasuya Yajna remained popular till mediaeval times and were later absorbed into the Durga Puja. Every yajna has Vishnu as the presiding deity. He is called *yajnapurusha*, the deity of yajna,⁹ and it is stated that '*yajno vai Vishnu*; yajna is Vishnu'. This is the reason why Narayana is worshipped first during the Durga Puja. The *narayanashila*, sacred emblem of Narayana, is ceremonially brought from Sri Jagannath temple, near Belur Math, and worshipped. Then the *shivalinga*, emblem of Shiva, which remains in Holy Mother's temple in Belur Math, is brought out during the celebration and also worshipped ritually. A special worship is held in the main shrine for Sri Ramakrishna after the *mahasnana*, ritual bath, of Sri Ramakrishna's relics, which are held in an urn called *atmarama kouto*. Moreover, since the Divine Mother was seen coming from Dakshineswar to Belur Math across the Ganga and also because much of Sri Ramakrishna's life and sadhana are related to that temple, special worship is performed on the *ashtami* at the Dakshineswar temple.

Vijaya dashami is a day of universal rejoicing, when the image of Mother Durga is immersed in the Ganga in front of Holy Mother's temple. At the first immersion ceremony Brahmananda danced like a boy with wild abandon, while Swamiji and others watched him. Even today monks, brahmacharis, and devotees dance before the immersion.

Mathur Babu used to arrange for the performance of Durga Puja at his house in Janbazar, Calcutta. Once he was disconsolate because the image of Durga was going to be immersed, but Sri Ramakrishna, who attended the puja, assured him the immersion meant that the Mother will return to the devotee's heart from where she arrived. 'Where will She go even if the ceremony of immersion be gone through? Can a mother afford to be away from her child? Sitting in the outer hall She accepted your worship these three days; She will now be nearer to you, sit in your heart, and accept your worship.'¹⁰

Swami Shivananda has said about the worship of Mother Durga at Belur Math:

The worship of the Mother at our monastery is without parallel. Here it is a worship of pure devotion. In our worship of Mother, we do not have any other motive than to please Her. Our prayer is this, 'Mother, be pleased to give us faith and devotion, and do good to the world.' ... People may spend thousands of rupees in worship, but such faith and devotion is rarely met with. Our worship is of the purest kind. ... The scriptures say that when the image is beautiful, the worshipper is devout, and he who assists in the worship is pure and selfless, such worship evokes a special manifestation of the deity. Here all the conditions are fulfilled. That is why the Mother is so manifest here. All the minute details of worship are meticulously observed here.¹¹

At the beginning of the puja, the *pratima* of Durga is ceremonially installed through

prana-pratishtha, infusing of life, before the actual worship takes place. This along with devoted worship, bhajans, japa, meditation, and innumerable prayers transform the *pratima* and makes it look even more alive. This phenomenon is very striking in Belur Math and is witnessed by millions who palpably feel the presence of the Divine Mother Durga. For a few days life's miseries and struggles are wiped out and everyone is elevated to a divine mood. Swamiji's and Brahmananda's visions, the Holy Mother's blessings, and the traditions of Belur Math—all coalesce and play out in a joyful religious fervour. Thanks to technology this celebration is today telecast all over the world, drawing those who are not able to be in Belur Math to the joy of worshipping the Great Mother Durga. The inaccessible becomes accessible, through her grace.



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Vivekananda in the US before the Parliament of Religions

Dr Sukanya Ray

VIVEKANANDA'S JOURNEY to the West in 1893 was occasioned by the Parliament of Religions to be held in connection with the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. That at the parliament and after it he gave a sterling performance and expressed the fundamental principles of Hinduism is well known. What is not so well known, though, are the thoughts he articulated in the US in the pre-parliament period, that is, between his arrival in that country on 1 August 1893¹ and his first exposition at the parliament on 11 September. This article focuses on Vivekananda's thoughts during that period, which shaped his future message in America and later in India.

Vivekananda's Experiences in Chicago

Kate Sanborn, Vivekananda's fellow-passenger on the train from Vancouver to Chicago, describes him:

Most of all I was impressed by the monk, a magnificent specimen of manhood—six feet two [*sic*], as handsome as Salvini [a then famous Italian actor] at his best, with a lordly, imposing stride, as if he ruled the universe, and soft, dark eyes that could flash fire if roused. ... He spoke better English than I did, was conversant with ancient and modern literature, would quote easily and naturally from Shakespeare or Longfellow and Tennyson, Darwin, Muller, Tyndall; could repeat pages of our Bible, was familiar with and tolerant of all creeds. He was an education, an illumination, a revelation!²

Suave, accomplished, and supremely confident though Vivekananda was, he did not sufficiently know the formalities of an international conference. He did not carry with him any official papers or credentials indicating that he was the accredited representative of Hinduism. He was not even aware of the exact dates on which the parliament was to hold its sessions. Soon after his arrival in Chicago, he realized the mistake he had committed in coming to that city 'unannounced'. The authorities of the Parliament of Religions informed him that in the absence of accreditation from a recognized organization and the registration of the accredited representative—the date for which was already over—he could not be accepted as a delegate. Sister Nivedita said: 'They [the disciples] thought Vivekananda had only to appear, and he would be given his chance. The Swami himself was as simple in the ways of the world as these his disciples. ... Nothing could have been more typical of the unorganizedness of Hinduism itself than this going forth of its representative unannounced, and without formal credentials, to enter the strongly guarded doors of the world's wealth and power' (1.402).

Apart from the refusal to admit him as a delegate, Vivekananda faced other difficulties in America. Chicago was expensive and his funds dwindled fast—from 187 to 130 pounds sterling in about two weeks.³ Winter was fast approaching and he had no warm clothing. He had to face hooting in the streets on account of his quaint dress. One day a man pulled at his turban; another

day a man from behind gave him a push. He had to endure disappointment, starvation, cold, hooting, and harassment, but he was not the one to yield in the face of such difficulties. He expressed at that time: 'I am determined, and I have a call from Above; I see no way, but His eyes see. And I must stick to my guns, life or death' (ibid.).

Contrasting with what he saw in the US, he grieved at India's poverty. The exploitation of his country by the British became very clear to him; he directed his ire at them and also at the weakness of Indians, who let them be exploited. He wanted Indians to give up their laziness and produce wealth that could sustain them and their dignity. Thus the idea of work as the solution to most of the country's misery was crystallized.

The parliament was scheduled for the second week of September 1893, and in order to be admitted as a delegate Vivekananda had to wait till then, which he could not afford to do in Chicago. He remembered Kate Sanborn's invitation to spend a few days in her house at Metcalf, not far away from Boston, and accordingly he went to her place and stayed as her guest.

On the US East Coast

While staying in Metcalf Vivekananda visited a women's prison in the nearby town of Sherborn. The prison treated its inmates benevolently, reformed them and sent them back to society as useful members. Vivekananda was deeply impressed by seeing a prison that treated people with respect and remarked: 'How grand, how beautiful, you must see to believe' (5.14). And as the situation of his people appeared in his mind,



North Terminal Station, Boston (between 1890 and 1899)

he voiced with anguish: 'Oh, how my heart ached to think of what we think of the poor, the low in India. They have no chance, no escape, no way to climb up. ... They have forgotten that they too are men. And the result is slavery' (ibid.). Vivekananda thought that the poor in India had to recover their lost individuality, and in order to do this the great teachings of Hinduism had to be given a practical application, brushing aside the engines of social tyranny. It was at this point that he started thinking about organizing a group of people that would be able to work for a common purpose. He declared: 'A hundred thousand men and women, fired with the zeal of holiness, fortified with eternal faith in the Lord, and nerved to lion's courage by their sympathy for the poor and the fallen and the downtrodden, will go over the length and breadth of the land, preaching the gospel of salvation, the gospel of help, of social raising-up—the gospel of equality' (5.15).

A large women's club in Boston invited Vivekananda to speak on the topic of child-widows of India. This club, like many others, were helping Ramabai—a learned woman from Maharashtra who had converted to Christianity—and

was collecting funds for her work in India. Ramabai, they said, was trying to improve the lot of India's child-widows, many of whom were living miserable lives. The picture that Vivekananda presented of child-widows in India was, however, different from that of Ramabai. He highlighted the positive side in their lives and interpreted certain social customs of India in a higher vein. In foreign lands Vivekananda would explain the condition his country was passing through, but would not resort to presenting India in a bad light to obtain foreigners' material support. Vivekananda's approach displeased the members of the Ramabai Circle, who were patronizing Indian child-widows through their attitude and criticizing what they called the evil practices of the Hindus. The result was that Vivekananda's speech was blacked out in Boston newspapers: 'This unpleasant experience was an eye-opener for Swamiji, who had now an inkling of the misrepresentation and vilification of his countrymen and their religion and social customs that was being carried on by the Christian missionaries.'⁴ Not that Vivekananda was trying to cover up their faults, but he began to seriously think of the plight and problems of women and how they can become useful to themselves and society.

Vivekananda had a very pleasant encounter with Professor John Henry Wright of Harvard University on 26 and 27 August 1893, at Annisquam—a small village on the Atlantic coast, some thirty miles north-east of Boston. Professor Wright had already heard about Vivekananda from the Sanborns and was pleased to meet and discuss for hours many subjects with the young monk. The professor was so impressed with him that he said that to ask Vivekananda credentials for the Parliament of Religions was as ridiculous as 'asking the sun to state its right to shine.'⁵ He volunteered to send a letter to the chairman of the parliament's committee expressing that 'here

is a man who is more learned than all our learned professors put together' (1.406).

Vivekananda delivered 'his first public lecture in the Western world at the little village church in Annisquam' (ibid.), on 27 August 1893. In this lecture he made it a point to mention that what the people of India really needed from the West was not religious instruction but industrial education and training in science and technology. When asked the reason why people in India were so backward, Vivekananda answered: 'They [the British] have their heels on our necks, they have sucked the last drop of our blood for their own pleasures, they have carried away with them millions of our money, while our people have starved by villages and provinces.'⁶ Marie Louise Burke writes:

[Vivekananda] was full of unhappiness for the suffering of his motherland, and correspondingly his mind was full of anger against all that contributed to her degradation. In the early days he ascribed a great deal of that degradation to the imperialism of the British, and it was only natural that he would lash out against a people who had ruthlessly crushed those whom he loved. It is well known that when Swamiji later met the English people on their home ground he became an ardent admirer of their many noble characteristics; nonetheless he never changed his opinion of British imperialism nor, for that matter, of any oppression of one people by another. He was a thorough student of world history, and whenever in the story of man's life he found injustice and inhumanity he never hesitated to point them out in no uncertain terms (1.30).

The idea of exchanging Western technology and science for India and Indian spirituality for the West was slowly being formulated in Vivekananda's mind. For him this exchange fulfilled both their needs and made both societies grow.

Vivekananda was amazed to see how social

divisions prevalent in the US did not bar anyone's progress. He thought of India's social divisions, with each division exploiting the weaker. He denounced the tyrannical priests and upper classes of India, who long before the British came had exploited the poor to the point of draining all their strength, and this enabled the Muslims to conquer India. 'They [the upper classes] ground down those poor people for their own wealth, they heard not the voice of distress, they ate from gold and silver when the people cried for bread, and the Mohammedans came upon them slaughtering and killing: slaughtering and killing they overran them' (1.32). In this connection Vivekananda prophesied that just as the Indian upper classes had to pay the price for their atrocities perpetrated upon the poor masses, the Europeans will have to pay the price of their tyranny: 'There will be another invasion of the Huns ... they will sweep over Europe' (*ibid.*).

Comparing the social situation in the US with that in India, Vivekananda observed that every man born in the US knew he was a free man, while every man born in India knew he

was a slave of society. He said that freedom is the only condition of growth, and that if freedom is taken away, the result is degeneration. All through his later teachings, Vivekananda stressed the need for freedom—physical, mental, moral, social, and spiritual.

From Annisquam Vivekananda moved to Salem, Massachusetts, staying there from 28 August to 4 September, as the guest of Mrs Kate Tannatt Woods. Following the invitation of Mrs Woods's Thought and Work Club, he spoke twice in the churches at Salem. In those lectures he tried to correct some of the misrepresentations and misconstrued myths about India related to sati, purdah, and suicide by people under the chariot wheels of Lord Jagannath at Puri. Next Vivekananda emphatically drove home the point that India's main concern and need was not religion but 'practicality'; it was 'with the hope of interesting the American people in this great need of suffering, starving millions that he had come to this country [the US]' (1.47). He further said with regard to the missionaries in India: 'The missionaries had fine theories there and started in with good ideas,



North View of Salem Residences from dome of State Capitol Bldg. 1900. (Denton's Collection) B M

but had done nothing for the industrial condition of the people. He said Americans, instead of sending out missionaries to train them in religion, would better send some one out to give them industrial education' (ibid.). We notice here Vivekananda's intention of making India an industrialized nation. The majority of small and big industries in India were broken by the goods imported from England. This was another reason for India's poverty, unemployment, and dependence. He wanted to wipe this out by the spread of industrial education, which he expected would create the proper climate for local industries to flourish.

Vivekananda next spoke at the convention of the American Social Science Association in Saratoga, New York. He gave three lectures there, and we know the title of two of them: 'The Mohammedan Rule in India' and 'The Use of Silver in India.' There are no reports available on these topics, but being a student of history Vivekananda's handling of this topic must have been wonderful—all through his letters and discourses one can observe how well he understood Indian history. Regarding the choice of speaking about the use of silver in India we presume that the assembly of social scientists at Saratoga requested him to deliver a lecture on this topic, as the silver standard was then a critical issue in American politics. He later expressed in a letter to Mary Hale: 'I do not know all the difficulties about the gold or silver standards (nobody seems to know much as to that), but this much I see that the gold standard has been making the poor poorer, and the rich richer. Bryan was right when he said, "We refuse to be crucified on a cross of gold." The silver standard will give the poor a better chance in this unequal fight. I am a socialist not because I think it is a perfect system, but half a loaf is better than no bread.'⁷

Divine Plan

Vivekananda spent three weeks on the East Coast prior to the Parliament of Religions. During this period he gave some eleven lectures and talks to a variety of people, earning from them both admiration and hostility. Indeed, 'he could not have a better preparation for all that was to come.'⁸

With this fine preparation, his financial difficulties overcome, and the necessary letter by Professor Wright to participate as a delegate in the Parliament of Religions, Vivekananda was all set to shake not only American minds but also to bring far greater changes in Indian souls, which were waiting for a saviour and leader. Vivekananda's sojourn to the East Coast of the US was part of the divine plan laid out for him. 'A new spirit now took possession of him. He was convinced beyond doubt that the Lord was with him, and with the spirit of a Prophet he awaited the coming of events.'⁹



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Journey from Darkness to Light

Sabitabrata Ghosh

TAMASO MA JYOTIR-GAMAYA; lead us from darkness to light', is a part of an ancient Vedic prayer still being recited by many people. It is a prayer that helps lead one from spiritual blindness to spiritual light. According to religion and philosophy, real blindness is spiritual blindness. Swami Vivekananda says: 'Ignorance is death, knowledge is life. Life is of very little value, if it is a life in the dark groping through ignorance and misery.'¹ India has produced saints who were physically blind but could see God dwelling within their hearts, as the fifteenth-century saint Surdas, who composed and sang thousands of melodious bhajans for Sri Krishna. There is also the story of 'Vilvamangala—a devotee who plucked his eyes out because he could not see God' (6.115). His infatuation to a woman was directed towards God by the latter, who opened his eyes to the futility of loving her. Later, in order to plunge into sadhana, Vilvamangala blinded himself to see only the beauty of the Lord within. The *Katha*

Upanishad says: 'The self-existing Lord destroyed the outgoing senses. Therefore, one sees the outer things and not the inner Self. A rare discriminating man, desiring immortality, turns his eyes away and then sees the indwelling Self.'²

Coming out of Social Blindness

Spiritual blindness is the terrible outcome of a life without a higher purpose. Compared to such blindness, being visually challenged is the least of problems. The spiritually blind can even learn a lot from the visually challenged, because their struggles are greater.

The importance of every single individual in the collective human progress is difficult to record, unless the individual's contributions have been extraordinary. However, human progress is not driven only by a few extraordinary people but by the innumerable ordinary ones. There have been outstanding physically challenged people and the vast majority of them have struggled to overcome personal and social disadvantages.

These daily silent struggles have gradually contributed to a changed social perception towards such people. In many cultures physically challenged persons are at present useful members of society, and in their own little way are significantly contributing to human progress. Compare the situation of such people in India today with only a few years ago, when there was no option but to beg and receive alms, which were often given with scorn or pity—a fortunate few were employed in weaving cloth or making wicker baskets. They were not taught to stand on their own feet or given the opportunity to develop themselves. Today many visually and other challenged people in India manufacture a host of products and are in the service and educational sectors too.

All these changes are aided by a better medical understanding of disabilities. Governmental and non-governmental organizations are offering opportunities and facilities to the differently abled, so that they can not only improve their own situation but also participate and contribute to the collective social life. Though there is a long way to go, their many silent struggles have finally been recognized. The changed perception towards differently abled people is growing. The present-day planning of any new building takes into consideration the special needs of the challenged by designing special bathrooms, ramps, wide doors, handrails, and so on for their particular convenience. This only shows that society is coming out of the darkness in this regard.

Normal people are applauded when they are able to overcome frailties and failures; much more recognition should be given to the challenged. Sometimes an individual's struggles, achievements, and contributions are so worthy of emulation that he or she becomes a kind of icon, as is the case of Helen Keller. Her colossal efforts against disabilities became a model to emulate, as she refused to let them circumscribe

her life and prevent her from fulfilling her potentialities. Mark Twain observed: 'The two greatest characters in the nineteenth century are Napoleon and Helen Keller. Napoleon tried to conquer the world by physical force and failed. Helen tried to conquer the world by power of mind—and succeeded!' ³ Once, when Helen's parents took her to Alexander Graham Bell, he said of Helen: 'I feel that in this child I have seen more of the Divine than has been manifest in anyone I ever met before' (ibid.).

The development of modern science, engineering, and computers has also opened innumerable doors for the physically challenged. Better equipment and sophisticated imaging software demonstrate that in no way physical disabilities diminish intelligence and that the only stumbling block is the articulation and expression of a disabled person's intelligence. No one can say that Stephen Hawking is not able to produce great thoughts in physics due to his disability. It is now being acknowledged that the disabled have a richer interior life than previously thought.

The World within

The physically challenged have to struggle even for a simple task like lifting a glass of water from the table. Many a time one can hardly understand their pain and frustration, and still these external difficulties are mild compared to the sense of isolation and loneliness they experience at times. Normal people also suffer from loneliness but the main cause of it is, according to me, selfishness. A loving, honest person is never lonely. The isolation and loneliness of visually challenged people is not due to selfishness but due to sensory deprivation to access certain sectors of the brain and normal people's diffidence to interact with them. These constant struggles also have a positive side of helping visually challenged people develop their character. They can create different kind of

images in their minds. Large areas at the back of the brain are dedicated to the visual and spatial sense. These areas are also connected to the limbic and memory systems. Eyes and optic nerves are sometimes called the extensions of the brain. In order to connect the object with a symbol or word Anne Sullivan, Helen Keller's teacher, wrote all the letters of the word 'd-o-l-l' on the child's palm, but Helen threw the doll away because she could not make out the nature of the object. Anne then decided on a slightly different method, writing 'w-a-t-e-r' and keeping Helen's hand under a tap. Immediately the child understood the meaning of water and her face lit up. In some area of Helen's brain the meaning of water created a cascading effect on her inner world.


The brain is a remarkable organ, and there was a time when it was thought that if the senses did not bring in any sensation, most of the areas became dark or atrophied. It is now known that the opposite occurs: the brain has the ability to weave a rich tapestry of neural connections. The brain starved from the external world builds up an inner world and concentrates its activity on the sensation that has managed to come in; it also commandeers other areas to understand the external world. Vision is actually the work of the brain that fills up many details of the picture. Training, however, enhances development of the brain at whatever age one may start, for the brain is plastic. Each brain is wired slightly differently from all others, and there are significant differences between male and female brains. Helen did not want to understand certain things and rebelled, but her teacher would not allow that. Anne Sullivan was committed to educate Helen by all means possible. The question was, why did Helen behave so? Was it due to lack of motivation, difficulty in reception, retention, or communication? It seemed that Helen was intelligent, motivated, and had a good memory, but

she was not able to properly understand things or communicate. Slowly, Anne developed Helen's understanding and communication skills and also taught her how to use her other senses to fill in the mental picture. Helen's tremendous sensitivity to the external world made it possible for her to face life in all its aspects—personal, social, and academic. Later, as we know, she learned how to continue her studies and graduated from Radcliffe College in 1904. As a deaf, dumb, and blind student she was unable to grasp the visual, auditory, and kinesic process of learning. She had to rely only on her sense of touch. She would touch the face or feel the movement of the throat of a speaker to understand what he or she was saying. She also communicated to people through her interpreter by means of sign language and typed out what she wanted to communicate. In spite of her physical disabilities, she reached a high level of proficiency in literature and a startling ability to describe the world vividly. Hope, aspiration, and knowledge constantly lit up her mind and dispelled the darkness. Her crusade against any form of oppression took her around the world meeting leaders and lecturing, with the help of an interpreter. Helen was perceptive enough to understand that society was divided and organized around an industrial life that became selfish and combative. Such a social atmosphere threatens one's better instincts, while evil propensities are intensified and protected. This shows that her way of perceiving things was certainly far better than most 'normal' people. Moreover, she worked hard to eliminate those social defects.

The nature of humankind is not to dwell on darkness and ignorance; that is why humans struggle for light. All life, whether high or low, is worth living mainly because of this reason. If one person succeeds in coming out of darkness, that person embodies the light and he or she becomes

a lamp for others. In every culture and religion sages and saints have lived and helped people who stumbled and fell. What is this light we are talking about? Swamiji says: 'This is the whole history of man. Finer and finer becomes the veil, more and more of the light behind shines forth, for it is its nature to shine. It cannot be known; in vain we try to know it. Were it knowable, it would not be what it is, for it is the eternal subject.'⁴

Many people are under the notion that visually challenged people, such as me, do not have a clear concept of spirituality or God. This notion is wrong, for all blind persons do have an idea of spirituality. All beings are born with innate spirituality and instinctively understand and respond to it. The first steps in spiritual life are *shama*, restraining the outgoing mental propensities, and *dama*, controlling of the external sense organs. Yogis shut their eyes and try to look inside. Swamiji used to sing the following song for Sri Ramakrishna: 'In dense darkness, O Mother, Thy

formless beauty sparkles; / Therefore the yogis meditate in a dark mountain cave.'⁵ True, being born blind has many disadvantages, but it also has advantages that are spiritual in nature. The *Katha Upanishad* says: 'His form does not exist within the range of vision; nobody sees him with the eye. When this Atman is revealed through deliberation, it is realized by the intellect. Those who know this become immortal.'⁶ 

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Seeking the Atman

Swami Swanubhavananda

SRI RAMAKRISHNA ONCE SAID to an enquirer: ‘You asked me about Self-realization. Longing is the means of realizing Atman. A man must strive to attain God with all his body, with all his mind, and with all his speech.’¹ The desire for Self-realization, for the vision of God comes to those who have understood their soul’s real thirst. This longing is found in the lives of sages and saints, and their revelation is etched deep in the world’s religious literature. Most of us seek the Atman in temples, mountains, forests, caves, and books, and think that it can be attained through studies, rituals, religious vows, and so on. Although these are recognized means, the essence of spirituality is longing for the vision of God, a longing that was intensely manifested in Sri Ramakrishna’s life and has changed the very concept of religion in the modern age. Intuitively, all religious people believe in the existence of divine grace, through which they know they can escape their present sufferings. In all scriptures there are prayers that voice this innate human longing. The *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* says: ‘He who created Brahma in the beginning and who, indeed, delivered the Vedas to him, in that very Deity, who is the revealer of the knowledge regarding the Atman, I, being verily desirous of liberation, seek refuge.’²

Desire for Liberation

The *Mundaka Upanishad* teaches: ‘Know that Atman alone that is one without a second, on which are strung heaven, earth, inter-space, mind, and the *pranas*, together with all the organs, and give up all other talks. This is the

bridge leading to immortality.’³ The same Upanishad says that *atmavaranam*, choosing to seek the Atman, is the principal means for attaining it: ‘The Atman is not attained through *pravachana*, study, nor through *medha*, the intellect, nor through *bahuna shruta*, much hearing [of scriptures]. The very Atman which this one [the aspirant] seeks is attainable through that fact of seeking; this Atman of his reveals its own nature’ (3.2.3). Ignorance of the Atman is strongly condemned in the shastras, and the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* goes to the extent of describing an ignorant person as *kripanah*, miserable,⁴ and an object of contempt: ‘*Pashurevam sa devanam*; he is like an animal to the gods’ (1.4.10).

Desire for liberation is the most important sadhana for moksha, liberation. The stronger the desire, the greater is the effort. *Mumukshutvam* is presented as the highest human need, while everything else is secondary. Acharya Shankara says: ‘Where this renunciation and yearning for freedom are torpid, there calmness and other practices are mere appearances, like water in a desert.’⁵ We find in other Vedanta texts the value of *mumukshutvam*, through the illustration of a person whose head is on fire rushing to extinguish it in water. And Sri Ramakrishna also teaches:

You know that story of the man who asked his guru how God could be realized. The guru said to him: ‘Come with me. I shall show you how one can realize God.’ Saying this, he took the disciple to a lake and held his head under the water. After a short time he released the disciple and asked him, ‘How did you feel?’ ‘I was dying for a breath of air!’ said the disciple.

When the soul longs and yearns for God like that, then you will know that you do not have long to wait for His vision. The rosy colour on the eastern horizon shows that the sun will soon rise.⁶

The idea of *atmavaranam* is also emphasized by Christ: ‘Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.’⁷ And in a fine example of the futility of mere *pravachana*, *medha*, and *bahuna shruta* we find sage Narada saying to sage Sanatkumara:

O venerable sir, I read the Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda, and Atharva Veda, the fourth. History and mythology, which are the fifth Veda, grammar, the rites for the manes, mathematics, the subject of natural disturbances, mineralogy, logic, ethics, etymology, the subject of ancillary knowledge concerning the Vedas, the science of the elements, the science of archery, astronomy, the science of serpents, the subject of fine arts—I know all these, O venerable sir! Such as I am, O venerable sir, I merely know the subjects textually, but I am not a knower of the Atman. It has been heard by me, from venerable people like you, that a knower of the Atman goes beyond sorrow. Such as I am, I am full of sorrow. O venerable sir, please take me beyond sorrow.⁸

Sri Ramakrishna says: ‘If I see that a scholar has no discrimination and renunciation, I regard him as worthless straw. I see that he is like a vulture, which soars high but fixes its look on a charnel-pit down below.’⁹

It is impossible to attain moksha unless there is *atmavaranam*, because one chooses a course of action after rejecting all alternatives. Acharya Shankara comments on the second part of the *Mundaka Upanishad* mantra mentioned earlier: ‘*Yam eva*, the very entity, the supreme Self,

which; *esah*, this one, the man of knowledge [aspirant]; *vr̥nute*, seeks to reach; this, supreme Self *labhyaḥ*, is attainable; *tena*, by the fact of hankering; but not through any other spiritual effort, for It is by Its very nature ever attained. ... *Eṣaḥ ātmā*, this Self; *tasya*, of his; *viv̥r̥nute*, reveals; *svām tanum*, Its own supreme nature, Its reality that was enveloped in ignorance.’¹⁰ The same mantra occurs in the *Katha Upanishad*¹¹ as well, and in this instance Shankara translates *vr̥nute*, as ‘*prārthayate*, to pray to’.¹² In simple words: when one ‘seeks to reach’ the Atman, which is the supreme Self, by ‘praying’, then the Reality reveals itself to the seeker.

Divine Grace

All religions recognize that it is difficult to attain the goal of life unaided. Help comes in the form of divine grace. Why then do some people seek the Atman and others do not? In reality, every one seeks the bliss of the Atman, but not every one realizes it. Supreme bliss fully exists in all beings, and though ‘entangled in the intricate maze of delusion and hard hit by sorrows and afflictions, the eye will turn of itself to one’s own real nature, the Inner Self. ... A time is sure to come to everyone, without exception, when he will do so—to one it may be in this life, to another, after thousands of incarnations.’¹³ God’s grace is uniformly available to every one, at all times and in all places. Grace is dependent on our efforts. For example, air, water, sunlight, everything is uniformly available, but only those who have tilled the land and sowed seeds will harvest a crop. Swamiji also says: ‘The wind of grace of the Lord is blowing on, for ever and ever. Do you spread your sail’ (5.394).

Had God blessed only some people, he would be subject to the charge of partiality. In other words, if God chose to bless only people who do some particular sadhanas—a certain amount of *japa* or *dhyana* per day—then he would be no

better than a shopkeeper! God's love knows no bargaining. As a chariot cannot move without both the wheels, similarly, without the effort of seeking the Atman, one cannot receive God's grace. Sri Ramakrishna says: "The grace of God falls alike on all His children, learned and illiterate—whoever longs for Him. The father has the same love for all his children. Suppose a father has five children. One calls him "Baba", some "Ba", and some "Pa". These last cannot pronounce the whole word. Does the father love those who address him as "Baba" more than those who call him "Pa"? The father knows that these last are simply too young to say "Baba" correctly.'¹⁴

There is, however, an important condition to deserve God's grace: 'One who has not desisted from bad conduct, whose senses are not under control, whose mind is not concentrated, whose mind is not free from anxiety, cannot attain this Atman through knowledge.'¹⁵ For those who have reached the limits of misery and want to throw it away, the Bhagavadgita teaches: 'Abandoning all forms of dharma take refuge in me alone; I will free you from all sins, grieve not.'¹⁶ God is the Self of all, the same in all—the Lord, the imperishable, free from birth, old age, and death.

Atmavaranam is the principal means of liberation, but certainly the role of God's grace is not to be undermined. This is supported by the teachings of all religions and cultures.

Let us end with a significant passage from the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*:

Brahmo Devotee: 'What are the means by which one can see God? Master: 'Can you weep for Him with intense longing of heart? Men shed a jugful of tears for the sake of their children, for their wives, or for money. But who weeps for God? So long as the child remains engrossed with its toys, the mother looks after her cooking and other household duties. But when the child no longer relishes the toys, it throws them aside

and yells for its mother. Then the mother takes the rice-pot down from the hearth, runs in haste, and takes the child in her arms.'¹⁷



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The one thing necessary is His grace. That is why the Master used to pray, 'O Mother, I do not know any spiritual practice. Please be gracious unto me.' Without the Lord's grace no spiritual practice is possible. No one works independently. Everyone works as directed by Him. He is the mechanic and the rest are mere machines. But it is very hard to remember all this. If one has this idea then one gets beyond all good and evil. If the Mother is gracious, then everything is possible—dispassionateness, spiritual practice, etc. The Lord has two powers, Vidya Shakti (knowledge) and Avidya Shakti (ignorance). If He removes from us the influence of the latter and helps with the former, then everything goes on well. So pray, 'Mother, be gracious unto me.'

—Swami Shivananda, in *Spiritual Talks*, 333



The Death of an Old Religion

Dipak Sengupta

The Road of the Dead from the top of the Pyramid of the Moon, Teotihuacan, Mexico

WE WERE STANDING on a wide path starting from an ancient pyramid and ending at a site with broken monuments. They call it the Road of the Dead. The city with a complex of pyramids and other structures is known as Teotihuacan or the City of the Gods. The story goes, as told by our guide Pablo Briceno, that all the gods assembled here in Teotihuacan on some long forgotten date when the whole universe was immersed in primordial darkness. There was no sun, no moon, nor any stars. There was no life on earth. All were destroyed at the end of the Fourth Sun Period. Before that there were three suns. Now it was the time of the Fifth Sun. The gods were to revitalize the universe and create the sun and the moon and all life again. After intense arguments

and internal fighting, two gods sacrificed themselves in a blazing fire and appeared in the sky as the sun and the moon. But to their horror the other gods realized that both the sun and the moon were stationary. More gods then sacrificed themselves in the fire and the sun and the moon began to move. And there was still another problem: the moon was brighter than the sun, which could not be. One of the gods killed a rabbit and threw it at the moon to cover his face, then the moon became dimmer than the sun. This Fifth Sun, which is shining now, will also fade out and die one day. Darkness will prevail, waiting for the appearance of the Sixth Sun. Natural calamities like earthquakes and volcanic eruptions will destroy the earth. That date, according to the Mayan calendar, falls in December 2012.

‘Yes,’ Pablo confirmed, ‘this year is the last year. The gods may not come back to recreate the universe.’ With the sacrifice of the gods, the sacrificial ritual became so important to the Aztecs and other Meso-Americans that human sacrifice was prevalent throughout the region. They believed that the sun has to be revitalized frequently with fresh blood that emanates from the human heart, Pablo told us. Since then this place has been a pilgrimage site for the whole of Meso-America.

The Rituals

Teotihuacan is some 50 km north-east of Mexico City. We have come here with a small group of tourists. Our first stop was not the ruins but a handicraft factory that makes handmade artefacts from obsidian. We visited the store. The objects made from the rock are mainly images of the ancient gods of a forgotten era. Those fearful looking gods have been reduced now to decorative pieces for tourists.

Archaeologists and anthropologists have yet to discover who the original inhabitants of Teotihuacan were. But it has been established that their cultural history extended from 300 BCE to 600 CE. We walked around the area and found that the city was lined with avenues and filled with markets, plazas, temples, and palaces arranged on a grid system of streets, drainage, and waterways. The major north-south avenue is now known as the Road of the Dead, a name obviously given by the Aztecs at a much later date. Another major street runs east-west and houses administrative buildings, offices, and markets. On the side streets

along the roads remain the foundations of houses with rooms around an enclosed courtyard.

As we go along the Road of the Dead southwards from the Pyramid of the Moon, we encounter on both sides the ruins of smaller pyramids and personal villas of kings and nobles with their own temples within the compounds. Pablo, who also has a degree in archaeology, cleared up a confusing matter that had been bothering me for a long time. These structures are called pyramids because of their shape, but they do not have any semblance with the Egyptian pyramids, which are basically tombs of kings and nobles. The religion practised by the Egyptians was dominated by cosmic order, death, and the next world where they would live on. The Meso-American pyramids are raised platforms to reach the gods in the sky. There used to be temples built over the top for the gods, but those temples are now empty. I was curious and asked Pablo where I could see the original statues or idols. He informed me that the only place is the Archaeological Museum in the city, where there are a few. Other than those, there are pictures drawn on paper by the missionaries who came with the Spaniards. How authentic these

Remains of the foundations of houses along the roads



are is anybody's guess. It must be mentioned here that only the priests and kings had the authority to go up to the temples. Commoners remained on the ground and caught only glimpses of the black robes of the priests, smoke coming out of the fire or incense, and sometimes the sight of the throbbing heart in the hands of the priest standing on the pyramid. Commoners conceived the idea of the gods and their attire when these priests dressed like the gods, came down, and danced with the people. This impersonation was called *Ixiptla*. But since most of the priests and kings were killed by the Spaniards, there was hardly anyone left to say what the gods really looked like.

Standing in front of the Pyramid of the Sun we noticed that both the pyramids had temples on the top, which no longer exist. These structures are some two thousand years old. Nobody knows who were the favourite gods installed and worshipped there. A tunnel was discovered under the Pyramid of the Sun; water flowed through the cavern by a channel. It is thought to be the place for *Tlaloc*, the rain god. The cavern

is said to be the birthplace of the sun and the moon. The cavern also served as the place for storing the last human bones from which the gods will recreate the universe and humankind.

I hesitated to climb the Pyramid of the Sun, which has narrow and steep steps like those of the Pyramid of the Moon. Sebastian, the hawker, who was following us with his products, whispered: 'If you don't climb, you won't reach the gods.' I looked at him and started climbing. He followed. It was quite a strenuous climb. In a low voice Sebastian started telling me stories. There is no way of knowing how much of myth is mixed with the truth in those stories. On the top of the platform the priests used to sacrifice war prisoners. Four of them would hold a prisoner, keeping him flat on a stone slab. The chief priest would take the holy obsidian dagger and pierce his breast with a single stroke. Then the priest would dip his hand in the gushing blood, tear off the victim's heart, and holding it high, would offer it to the sun god. The head of the victim was cut off and the bloodstained body

Pyramid of the Sun, Teotihuacan



was rolled down the steps to the rejoicing crowd. 'These steps must have been covered with blood,' Sebastian whispered, and I felt shaky.

Struggling up the steps, I finally reached the top. It was laid with stone slabs of different sizes and shapes. It was half the size of a football field. There was a raised slab in the middle. We sat down on it. Sebastian explained that this was the platform on which the victims were sacrificed. Convinced that sacrificing war prisoners was a must for any festival, I later asked Pablo what happened when there was no war for a long period, and he replied that in that case friendly nations would declare war against each other with the only purpose of capturing prisoners. These used to be called 'Flower Wars'. Only the best warriors would fight in these wars.

The top of the pyramid was not very crowded—not many tourists like to climb those two hundred steep steps. But I was told that thousands and thousands of people from around Meso-America congregate on this pyramid on the spring equinox, when the sun rises on a straight line due east from this pyramid. They say that on this occasion the top of the pyramid is literally covered with people. How do they pray? They all raise their hands to the sky and shout 'sun god, sun god', mostly in Spanish and some in Nahuatl, their original language. Some of the prayers in archaic Nahuatl were revived from sixteenth-century records. When the conquistadores invaded the region, Franciscan friars came with them to baptize the native people into the Roman Catholic religion. To eradicate the older religion they destroyed and burnt all the huacas—religious images—temples, books, artefacts, and every other thing connected with the older religion. There was no one left who could keep the tradition alive. Those missionaries and conquistadores would have been shocked to see how the descendants of

their beloved Christian folks are today following a pagan ritual so enthusiastically.

Main Cities

Mexico City, the capital of Mexico, is like Kolkata, with not so wide roads, shops all around, and people everywhere. However, a major difference with Kolkata is that the roads are clean in Mexico City, so much so that sheets of paper are laid across the roadside curb and people sit on them with plates in hand served by the local eateries.

The staple diet of Mexicans is maize, which is prepared in different ways. This crop was cultivated in Mexico and transported to the old world by the invaders. Maize was like a deity to the Mexicans. Fresh green maize plants used to be picked from the fields for the fertility festival and then dressed and set up in all the houses for the worship of Centeotl, the maize god—very much like the Nabanna ritual in Bengal, celebrated in the month of November with the first crop of rice. Even today Aztec women handle maize reverentially; they never throw it on the floor and keep it in the best place of the house; they even breathe softly on the maize before placing it in hot water, so that it can bear the pain. Chocolate, or 'xocoatl' in Nahuatl, originally came from Mexico, so did tobacco, potato, and avocado.

We also visited Cholula and Puebla. Cholula's original name is Chololan, an Aztec town that was destroyed by the Spanish conquistadores. To understand what happened in Cholula and the rest of the Aztec Empire we have to go back five hundred years, to the beginning of the sixteenth century. Europe was in turmoil with war between states, the uprising of the common people, and the fall in agricultural production, which left the continent in a pathetic state. The greatest blow came from the Reformers, when the Christian world was split into two. There was

a revolt against papal rule, and under Martin Luther, Protestantism took shape. European kings realized that trade with countries outside Europe was essential for survival and dominance. In 1492 Christopher Columbus, a seaman from Genoa, set sail in search of India. He was financed and encouraged by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of unified Spain. Apart from the spirit of the Renaissance, which motivated people to explore new worlds and acquire knowledge, the main purpose of the king was to find a sea route to India in order to acquire spices and gold. The land route had become too dangerous and took too much time. Columbus arrived at what is today known as the West Indies Islands; he named the islands 'Las Indias', the Indies, and their inhabitants were called 'Indios', Indians—names that are still current.

The adventure to the New World was later picked up by a ruthless Spanish mercenary named Hernán Cortés. He took permission from Charles V, the then King of Spain and Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, to explore the New World on the other side of the ocean. He would administer to the natives Christian baptism and also bring to the king as much precious metal as possible.

Hernán Cortés landed on the Atlantic shore of present-day Mexico on the Good Friday of 1519. The local Totonac people were awed to see ships with triangular sails, which appeared to them like floating mountains from a distance. This reminded them of one of their mythical stories. In the Kingdom of Tula, not far from there, Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent god of fertility and creation as well as the prime deity of that land, wanted to abolish human sacrifice and instead worship gods with flowers, fruits, and butterflies. But Tezcatlipoca, the god of war and sacrifice, challenged him and chased him out of Tula. While leaving the land Quetzalcoatl's divine voice echoed through the ocean that he would come back with more vigour in royal dress

and on floating mountains. The simple Totonacs were convinced that the arrival of the Spaniards with their ships was the return of Quetzalcoatl. The conquistadores alighted from the ships with full armour and helmets, along with guns, cannons, horses, and a pack of ferocious looking mastiff dogs. Nothing that came out of the ship was familiar to the Totonacs. Thinking that they were Teotl, gods, the people greeted them with joy. Along with the soldiers also came Brother Olmedo, a Franciscan monk with a mission.

Cholula, then known as Chololan, was an independent kingdom, but had to pay tribute to the Aztec emperor. The town was so big and beautiful that the Spaniards could only compare it with their city of Granada, though Cholula was still better fortified and planned, with clean streets that were decorated with flowering trees. The Spaniards were invited by the king to visit Cholula and be his guest.

Today Cholula is a typical Mexican city with crowded streets, lined up houses, and people everywhere. We parked on a side road. Cathy, our guide, continued relating some historical facts on Cholula before we ventured to visit the important sites. Cortés came to Cholula with his marching soldiers in full armour, some on their horses, firing guns, and letting loose their dogs. The entire crowd was impressed as well as scared. They stayed in the city that night, and the next day, through a stratagem, they killed the population of Cholula, which is still known today as the City of the Massacre.

We stopped before the massive structure of a pyramid, of which only the lower part remains. This pyramid is the largest of all the pyramids in Mexico. The base is twice the size of the Egyptian pyramid of Cheops. There was an impressive temple at the top. The Spaniards found the place central and most suitable to build a church. They demolished the temple, excavated the top of the

pyramid, and built the Church of all Remedies.

We climbed up the steps to reach the top, from where there was a beautiful vista: the city of Cholula with the Popocatepetl volcano in the background. We were able to see the large cathedral built in the city's downtown, where the finest temple of Quetzalcoatl once stood and where the massacre took place.

From Cholula we went to the picturesque city of Puebla, whose full name is Puebla de los Angeles, people of the angels. It is famous for an abundance of churches. We visited the two famous ones: the Cathedral, which is the second largest in Mexico, and the Iglesia de Santo Domingo, Church of St Dominic, known for its exquisitely designed chapels. Our guide Cynthia suggested we first visit the latter, as it was the most elaborately decorated church in Mexico. So we did.

Built in the seventeenth century, the Iglesia de Santo Domingo has a baroque design, which was the style of that period. Cynthia took us to the famous chapel, the Capilla del Rosario, Chapel of the Rosary. Along the wall, at eye level, there is a series of grotesque human heads on a continuous string, in the shape of a rosary. The dome is no less ornate with saints, cherubs, dancing angels, and a heavenly choir. All the designs are made of heavily gilded wood. The main church facade is even more intricately designed and decorated with dazzling gold; it has several niches, each one embedded with the image of a saint. All along the top and the sides angels and archangels are flying about. Cynthia said that the first generation



Cholula City and Volcano Popocatepetl

of Spaniards were convinced that the demons and devils of the Aztecs were present everywhere to hurt the newcomers. Therefore, in order to fight them, they created their own army of saints, angels, and archangels. The particular feature of this church is an abundant use of gold for ornamentation—Cynthia informed us that there are twenty-eight tons of gold decorating the church.

The City on the Lake

The origins of the Aztecs are shrouded in mystery. Mythology has it that they were an island nation on the ocean at Aztlan, from where they set off on a long and hazardous migration across the northern landscape in search of a place for their permanent habitat. They are believed to have been guided by their god Huitzilopochtli. They were looking for a sign predicted by their ancestors: an eagle perched on a prickly cactus devouring a snake—which is the symbol in the centre of Mexico's flag. They finally located a spot on an island in Lake Texcoco and established their first city, which would become the future capital of their empire.



'Storming of the Teocalli by Cortez and His Troops', by Emanuel Leutze, 1848

The people took the name of Mexica from the god Mexi. This was how they were known to the Spaniards, and later the whole land became known as Mexico. They had another name also: Aztec, from the original home Aztlan. On the rocky island in Lake Texcoco they built a city and named it Tenochtitlan. They also built a sister city on the lake's shore and named it Tlatelolco. At the centre of Tenochtitlan there was a plaza and in the centre of the plaza a pyramid with two temples on its top. Compared with the crowded, filthy, fly-infested cities of fifteenth-century Spain this was beyond belief. The Spaniards called it the Dream City. Next to the temples was the palace of Emperor Moctezuma, and beyond the plaza were the noblemen's cottages with gardens and parks.

We stood on the same plaza where Hernán Cortés and his conquistadores once stood looking at the pyramid, the temples, the palace, and the gardens with awe. Today there is a cathedral on the spot where the pyramid was. On the other side, the National Palace has replaced the

emperor's residence. Behind the cathedral a new excavation is revealing the broken steps and surrounding area of the pyramid.

After the massacre of Cholula the conquistadores marched towards the capital city of Tenochtitlan. As they moved inland, the soldiers burnt down idols and temples, Brother Olmedo conducted masses, and Cortés explained to the inhabitants that their religion was a devil's religion and that Christ is the saviour. They forced the *papas*, priests, at gunpoint to

break their own gods to rubble, burn the temples, and destroy the pyramids. They set up crosses on local places of worship, skirmished and fought through the mountainous country, and picked up a host of Meso-American allies who joined them against the tyrannical Moctezuma—many of these allies were later killed. That was the beginning of the end of the 'Indian' religion.

Cortés reached Tenochtitlan and after some time a war broke. Though the Spaniards were only a few men, they had cannons, guns, steel swords, horses, armour, and military training, while Moctezuma's warriors were equipped only with bows and arrows. Even though severely handicapped, Moctezuma and his men held the city, and the battle continued for about four months. The Spaniards would have lost the war had their backup support not reached Veracruz in time—Veracruz was the first city founded by Cortés. With newly supplied provisions of gunpowder, cannon balls, and equipment they went on with fresh vigour. The Spaniards finally captured the city on 13 August 1521. Cortés

remarked: 'It was a war between our God and their gods. Our Christian God won.' What he did not mention was that their God sent another invincible ally to support their invasion: communicable diseases like smallpox, measles, influenza, and many more. A large number of the local population, especially those who were exposed to the foreigners and their animals, died of these diseases before the war was over.

Cortés occupied the city and the neighbouring areas. The sister city of Tlatelolco was taken over and ransacked, the temples and the pyramids destroyed. With time a church of the Virgin Mary, with a monastery, was built in the same place. Our guide for Mexico City took us there. The place is called Plaza de las Tres Culturas, plaza of the three cultures. The guide pointed out the location of the three cultures: the old broken steps of the pyramid and other structures, the church and monastery built in the sixteenth century, and a modern building built in the nineteenth century, which has photographs showing different ethnic communities of Mexico.

Conclusion

In 1820 Mexico gained its independence from Spain. When Mexicans overthrew Catholic Spain, they also overthrew the rule and control of the Catholic Church. Representatives of the Vatican were not allowed to operate with full legal rights. It was only in 1992 that Mexico and the Vatican established full diplomatic relations, but memories of destruction and exploitation linger on.

We were sitting in a cafeteria outside Chichen Itza, the Mayan ruins in Yucatan. Jose, our guide, was in a pensive mood. For the last two hours we had walked through the pyramids, temples, offices, houses, observatory, ball-court, and some other architectural wonders. Jose was talking all the time about his ancestral history, religion, and civilization. Sitting opposite me he was vacantly looking now at the Pyramid of the Sun on the horizon, unmindful of the surroundings. He was almost whispering: 'All you will remember is the rituals of human sacrifice. Everybody does so. They don't realize how many people were killed here on this land to destroy the old religion and introduce a new one. The saddest fact is that I cannot go back to my ancestral life and religion. Whatever I told you, you are recreating it in your minds through your imagination, but all we have are a few stones and books, mostly by Spaniards. The rest is guesswork. Thank you for visiting us. You are surprisingly sympathetic and understanding of our idol worship and other rituals.' He suddenly broke off the sentence and left.

PB

Plaza de las Tres Culturas, Tlatelolco, Mexico City



Eternal Words

Swami Adbhutananda

Compiled by Swami Siddhananda; translated by Swami Sarvadevananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

Holy Mother

FROM TIME TO TIME the Holy Mother used to visit Balaram Babu's house. I used to stay in one of the outer rooms. Some people would come and tell me: 'Sir, Mother has arrived upstairs.' I would respond: 'So what?' Not understanding my inner mood, many used to get annoyed with me. Since I didn't even go to Udbodhan, they would ask: 'Why don't you go?' Also, because I didn't stay at the Math, they would ask why I didn't stay there. I would respond: 'Is my Master residing only there? Is he not here? I am convinced that he will manifest wherever I call on him.'

After establishing the Math Swamiji brought the dust of Holy Mother's feet and installed it [in the shrine]. Even today it is worshipped at Belur Math. As long as the Math remains, it will surely be worshipped there. Swamiji alone understood who the Holy Mother is! She is verily Lakshmi. No one else understood that. To whom shall I say this? Much austerity is required in order to understand her grace. You superficially say that you believe in the Divine Mother. One must do tapasya to honour her; then alone will her compassion dawn. As a result of her compassion can she be understood; then only, if you say that you believe in her, it will be genuine. Is faith in the Mother a matter of talk?

You are all living like royalties. The Mother passed her days with so many difficulties! She spent so many days living in a small room! No

one thought of that. No one was in the least aware of when she finished her bath in the Ganga. Make the Mother your ideal. What will you obtain by coming to me? The Divine Mother is there. I am myself sitting here waiting to realize her. It is your great fortune that you have received instruction from the Mother. Where can one find dispassion such as hers? So long as one has his teeth, one cannot understand their greatness; only towards the end will one understand. If you don't meditate or do japa now, what will the clicking of your rosary accomplish in your old age? Does one become spiritual merely by useless rambling? Sit in one place, meditate and do japa. The most important thing is to work hard.

What more shall I ask the Mother? She knows everything. She is surely my Dakshineswar Mother. Is there any parallel to her compassion? Does she expect anything from us? No expectations! All of this is nothing but her unconditional compassion. If one can repeat the name of the Lord a little in the morning and evening and spend one's life with a pure heart, she shelters and redeems one from this burning samsara. Look at this boy [meaning himself]. He doesn't even know how to speak. He doesn't even know where his home is. Yet even the Mother has blessed him.

Do not be unfaithful. You are all petty jivas—you have no belief, faith, or devotion at all in the Mother, yet in mere words you cry out:

‘Mother! Mother!’ I don’t want such devotion to the Mother. My devotion to the Mother is not like yours.

Staying with me so many days, you may ask why I write letters to so many people but none to the Mother. Do you know why I do not write to her? The Mother knows my entire past and future. What is the point of writing a letter to her—to show off? What is the need to write a letter to someone who knows every bit of my past and future? One should only write to people who have no such knowledge. If I didn’t believe this, I would surely suffer.

See, how compassionate is the Mother! If anyone goes to her and says: ‘Mother, I will be a doctor or a lawyer’, the Mother says: ‘That is good; may you be that.’ Even if someone tells her that he wishes to marry, she almost invariably gives her consent. She knows what desire is present in the depth of the heart. What difference would it make if she said no?

I talk about the Master and Swamiji. I don’t talk about the Mother just anywhere and everywhere. Not everyone will understand; rather they will misunderstand. For that reason, I don’t speak about her. One day, when she was living in Nilambar Mukherjee’s house and Yogin Maharaj was not present, she asked me to go to the bazaar. I said: ‘I cannot do that. I won’t be able to bear all such troubles for you. Let me go call Yogin.’ Mother said: ‘You need not go; you stay.’ How much of such trouble I made for her! Yet she never became annoyed with me. She had so much power to endure. There can be no comparison with that! People troubled her so much but she never showed any irritation.

If I don’t visit the Mother, will she become a stranger? Do you ask me what I think of the Mother? She is the Mother Lakshmi; again, sometimes she is Sita.

Meditation, Faith, Devotion, and Love

It will be enough if one’s mind becomes absorbed in worship. To worship is to offer God’s own articles back to him. One who eats food without first offering it to the Lord is a thief! If one performs worship with faith and affection, the Master surely resides there. Otherwise, he runs away. Hostility flees from one who performs worship, meditation, and japa.

Sadhus say with a hope: ‘Let the body remain fit so that I may properly meditate and do japa.’ It is very hard work to meditate and do japa. If one lacks the strength even to follow a simple order, what type of meditation and japa can he perform? By meditating and doing japa you will see your own faults. Also, your heart will weep for others. Those who meditate and do japa should eat less at night. By eating too much one becomes restless; the mind will not become absorbed in meditation and japa. At night everything everywhere remains calm; that is surely the most conducive time for meditation and japa.

One who loves God is blessed. Because there is selfishness in human love, a person may love someone today but hate him tomorrow. But there is no trace of selfishness in God’s love. If you treat a person well ninety-nine times but offend him just once, he will hate you. If you commit ninety-nine offences towards God but call upon him with restless longing only once, he will give you shelter.

Do you know what worship is? What shall I give him? Everything belongs to him! Any choice items you offer him are already his. The Master used to say: It is like a rich man sitting in the parlour of his garden-house, with the gardeners and others busy at their work, when a guard arrives and says: ‘Sir, I have kept for you a tree-ripened papaya from yesterday. Please accept it.’ The rich man knows that the garden is his, the tree is his, and the papaya also belongs to him. Yet, will he

not acknowledge the reverence of the guard who has lovingly kept aside the papaya for him? To worship is to behave exactly like that.

The Master said that there is no harm if one worships after eating a bit. Otherwise, with the stomach grumbling, how can one worship? One's mind will be fixed on eating. If, after eating a bit, one sits for worship, the mind becomes quiet.

It is very bad to have outer devotion and inner deceitfulness. God is far away from that. These people perform devotion either with one or another selfish motive. For this reason they do not grow spiritually. That is why the Master used to say that one must unite the mind and the speech in the practice of devotion. No benefit comes from a show of devotion. Such acts are the product of a calculating mind. God is surely far off from that. Devotion done for display cannot last long; its true nature is revealed with time. For that reason whatever you do, do it with proper love and respect. Whoever does so is surely a true devotee.

Now you are all troubled to serve me. At the end you will all cry for me to say a single word. After the body goes, what will you gain by offering a flower to my picture? If one serves while the body remains, one gets the benefit.

One day in the early morning the Master was passing near the Panchavati to answer the call of nature. He saw Harish meditating under the Panchavati trees. While going [past him] the Master was speaking softly in his own mood saying: 'Harish, the one on whom you meditate does not get even a pitcher of water from you.'

Be it in family life or on the spiritual path, nothing happens without love and faith. Can any work be accomplished by compulsion? With devotion one does not feel as if one is giving anything up. One's mind gradually becomes settled in God. Devotion alone is important.

I am here—my chosen ideal is here—there is no one else in this world. If one achieves this attitude, one's mind becomes pure. This is truly meditation.

One who joyfully offers God's own articles to him is a fortunate person—God accepts that. He does not accept that which is given without devotion. One who has no devotion has an impure mind. Be assured—God never accepts such worship.

Renunciation and Detachment

Surely that religion is superior in which many *tyagis*, renunciates, are born.

If one wants to attain God, one must have true *tyaga*, renunciation. God loves the renunciate dearly. Without a spirit of renunciation, one cannot attain God. In speaking of renunciation, one must understand that it means to renounce wealth, pride, and all the rest. At times one must even forget the body, which is such an object of endearment. Renunciation can never be possible when there remains even the least desire for enjoyment. Can a mind full of cravings even grasp the word 'renunciation'? God is far off from one who craves admiration.

A man cannot properly call upon God if he lacks the basic necessities. But there is no limit to a person's needs. Will a person in a state of deprivation call upon God? Only one whose sense of deprivation is removed can truly call upon God. The sense of deprivation is such that, as much as you think you are deprived, so much you will find your needs increasing! For that reason those who want to see God should follow the path of renunciation.

Is it merely a matter of talk to become a *tyagi* sannyasin? It requires the spiritual practice of many thousands of births to become a real sannyasin. For so many lives they ruled kingdoms, enjoyed kingly pleasures, and only after

developing aversion to all such things they became monks!

People go mad for the enjoyment of happiness, name, fame, money, and the rest. Really, they engage in so many schemes to attain these things! Buddha was the son of a king, but renounced even the kingdom to attain knowledge. Moreover, while performing austerities, when miraculous powers started coming to him, he said: 'I obtained the kingdom without performing austerities. Shall I now, by performing austerities, enjoy all that again?' Saying this, he drove away all miraculous powers and the like.

If one can become a *tyagi* like Buddha, one will see God. One has to give up everything to attain God. How many people attain liberation? Ramprasad said: 'Out of a hundred thousand kites, one or two are cut free. Seeing this, Mother, you clap your hands laughing.' The meaning is that God alone sets us free. He himself shows affection to the freed soul and exalts him.

God says: 'If you give up your craving for sense objects, you will attain me. If you want worldly objects, you will not attain me. You will not get the two together.'

It is not possible to renounce anything under duress.

If one does not renounce, there is no chance of understanding God.

The minds of those who have renounced everything for God rest in deep joy. Indeed, God becomes very pleased with them. Worldly minded people hate them. But God loves them dearly and thinks: 'They have given up everything for my sake.'

You conceitedly think: 'I am a *tyagi*.' What kind of renunciate are you? What did you have that you have given up? Buddha was a renunciate. Buddha was the son of a king. He was a prince. He lacked nothing. Yet he renounced everything to know the Truth. Buddha is verily

the ideal of renunciation. He alone can be called a true renunciate. He realized that the power of dharma is the greatest of all powers. People stay busy, restlessly trying to secure the excitement of ruling a kingdom. They think: 'People will obey my commands.' Contemplating on this Buddha gave up the ruling of his kingdom. He suffered for the sake of humanity. God's compassion for jivas is boundless.

For a monk renunciation is verily his charm. For a worldly man money is his chief glory. How much difference there is between a monk and a householder! Householders are living with honour and prestige. A monk casts off honour and prestige. That is why I say that householders should not stay with a monk all of the time, lest the mental attitudes of both become disturbed. If one takes refuge with a renunciate, he will surely become a monk life after life.

The moment you speak of doing some work, young people are overcome by lethargy. Everyone in this world surely wants happiness. No one wants to suffer.

Upon seeing their son becoming a monk, it is a joyous occasion if parents become happy in the understanding that, by such means, their son is attaining true manhood. It is only when parents do not understand this that they make such a fuss. How fortunate are the parents whose child becomes a monk! By becoming a monk one will remain happy. It is a great shame if a renunciate's parents place an obstacle in his righteous path.

Maharaj [Swami Brahmananda] is the charm of our monastery. Whoever receives the shelter of a monk is exceedingly fortunate. What happens when a person receives shelter from a sadhu? Discrimination and dispassion blossom in his mind. His mind becomes pure. How can he, whose own suffering has not yet been removed, remove the suffering of others?

(To be continued)

Svarajya Siddhih: Attaining Self-dominion

Gangadharendra Saraswati

Translated from Sanskrit and annotated by Swami Narasimhananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

Renunciation of Desires

OBJECTION: Cannot it be said that the *Isha Upanishad* presents the concepts of action and knowledge of Brahman and then goes on to show the conjunction between the two?

Reply: That position cannot be maintained because it will go against the content of the *Upanishad* that begins with the words ‘*īśā vāsyamidam sarvam*; all this should be covered by the Lord.’⁴⁶ And as part of the process of attaining the knowledge of Brahman, the same *Upanishad* talks of renunciation through the words, ‘*tena tyaktena bhuñjīthāḥ*; protect [your Self] through that detachment’ (ibid.). The suggested position would be against renunciation. The word *tyaktena* has been used here to mean renunciation only and not action. Used separately, the root word *tyajīḥ*, from which *tyakta* has been derived, means only complete renunciation as represented by *sannyasa*. The *Upanishad* further says that through complete renunciation, *sannyasa*, the *Atman* should be nourished, protected. Thus, the ending of the mantra with the words, ‘*mā gṛdhāḥ kasyasviddhanam*; do not covet anybody’s wealth’ is proper in this context, where attachment has been prohibited. The stance that the suffix *ktā* has been used in *tyaktena* to mean action has been refuted by Acharya Shankara in his commentary. He writes: ‘He, who is thus engaged in the thought of the Self as God, has competence only for renouncing the three

kinds of desire for son etc. [wealth and worlds], and not for *karma*. *Tena tyaktena*, through that detachment. *Tyaktena* means, through detachment, (and not “by any abandoned thing”); for, a son or a servant, when abandoned or dead, does not protect one, since he has no connection with oneself. So the meaning of the Vedic word (*tyaktena*) is indeed this—“through renunciation”.⁴⁷

Swami Vivekananda explains the need for renunciation:

We have to cover everything with the Lord Himself, not by a false sort of optimism, not by blinding our eyes to the evil, but by really seeing God in everything. Thus we have to give up the world, and when the world is given up, what remains? God. What is meant? You can have your wife; it does not mean that you are to abandon her, but that you are to see God in the wife. ... What existed was the Lord Himself. It is He who is in the child, in the wife, and in the husband; it is He who is in the good and in the bad; He is in the sin and in the sinner; He is in life and in death. ...

Do not desire anything. What makes us miserable? The cause of all miseries from which we suffer is desire. You desire something, and the desire is not fulfilled; the result is distress. If there is no desire, there is no suffering. But here, too, there is the danger of my being misunderstood. So it is necessary to explain what I mean by giving up desire and becoming free from all misery. The walls have no desire and they never suffer.

True, but they never evolve. This chair has no desires, it never suffers; but it is always a chair. There is a glory in happiness, there is a glory in suffering. If I may dare to say so, there is a utility in evil too. The great lesson in misery we all know. There are hundreds of things we have done in our lives which we wish we had never done, but which, at the same time, have been great teachers. As for me, I am glad I have done something good and many things bad; glad I have done something right, and glad I have committed many errors, because every one of them has been a great lesson. I, as I am now, am the resultant of all I have done, all I have thought. Every action and thought have had their effect, and these effects are the sum total of my progress.

We all understand that desires are wrong, but what is meant by giving up desires? How could life go on? It would be the same suicidal advice, killing the desire and the man too. The solution is this. Not that you should not have property, not that you should not have things which are necessary and things which are even luxuries. Have all that you want, and more, only know the truth and realise it. Wealth does not belong to anybody. Have no idea of proprietorship, possession. You are nobody, nor am I, nor anyone else. All belongs to the Lord, because the opening verse told us to put the Lord in everything. God is in the wealth that you enjoy. He is in the desire that rises in your mind. He is in the things you buy to satisfy your desire; He is in your beautiful attire, in your beautiful ornaments. This is the line of thought. All will be metamorphosed as soon as you begin to see things in that light. If you put God in your every movement, in your conversation, in your form, in everything, the whole scene changes, and the world, instead of appearing as one of woe and misery, will become a heaven.⁴⁸

Knowledge is Superior to Actions

Therefore, words like *kurvanneveha* relate to ignorance. The ignorant who advocate the

performance of good actions say that bad effects of actions cannot be eradicated without the performance of actions till one's death. However, the *Isha Upanishad* holds that the knowledge of Brahman is superior to the performance of actions; hence, it first denounces those who have not attained Self-knowledge and then talks about the knowledge of Brahman: 'What delusion and what sorrow can there be for that seer of oneness. He is all pervasive, pure.'⁴⁹ This statement is supported by statements in other Upanishads, like, 'A knower of the Self goes beyond sorrow'⁵⁰ and 'Therefore it became all.'⁵¹ The superiority of the knowledge of Brahman is thus established by the result of its taking one beyond sorrow and making a person one with all. The mantra, '*vidyāṁ cāvidyāṁ ca*; worship and Vedic rites'⁵² does not relate to the conjunction of the knowledge of Brahman and actions, but it relates to *aparā vidyā*, like the worship of Prana and the like. Therefore, in this context, words like, '*mṛtyuṁ tīrtvā*; crossing over death' (ibid.) mean natural death, which is a sign of the knowledge of Vedic rites and the absence of the knowledge of Brahman. Having crossed such death and becoming one with various gods, one becomes immortal. Here immortality is the condition of becoming one with the gods. Also, the mantra '*sambhūtiṁ ca vināśaṁ ca*; the unmanifested and the destruction' (14) relates only to the conjunction of the worship of the manifested and the unmanifested. Therefore, the meaning here is that death, which is a sign of not being supernatural, should be crossed. And immortality, which here means becoming one with Prakriti, is attained.

If the conjunction of the knowledge of Brahman and actions were meant in both the instances mentioned above, then in statements like, '*pūṣannekarṣe*; O Sun, O solitary traveller' (16) the travel towards East will also become irrelevant, because a knower of Brahman has no

movement as told in the statement, '*na tasya prāṇā utkrāṃanti*; his organs do not depart.'⁵³

Objection: If this be so, what is the relevance of unnecessarily talking of the conjunction of actions and worship? If the conjunction of the knowledge of Brahman and performance of actions were not intended, then why should the scripture suddenly talk of the conjunction of actions and worship?

Reply: In the mantra '*īśā vāsyam*' the detachment of the renunciate and the resultant *sannyasa* is meant. In the next mantra, the allegiance to actions by a person who wants to live long is spoken of. The elaborate explanation of the actions are presented in the Brahmanas of the Vedas. Renunciation has been explained in other portions of the Vedas like the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad*. To briefly depict these two tendencies of action and renunciation, the subsequent five mantras of the *Isha Upanishad* speak of knowledge and the rest speak of actions. This is the meaning that can be churned out of the mantras. Though this meaning of the mantras seems to be closer to actions, it is not so because a person established in the knowledge of the unattached, unaffected, unchanging Atman, which is Existence-Consciousness-Knowledge Absolute, becomes unfit to perform any action. Though there is a system of rituals in the Vedas, the knower of Brahman is unable to perform any of them. Therefore, the person who has only the knowledge of the 'Mantra' and 'Brahmana' portions of the Vedas, which speak of rituals, has the right to perform actions. Otherwise, a person who has seen the true meaning of the Vedas cannot perform any actions. In a similar manner, the argument of the proponents of the conjunction of worship and knowledge is also quashed because worship is nothing but mental action.

Sri Ramakrishna speaks of his experience, which is illustrative of how one who has the

knowledge of Brahman becomes unfit to perform rituals:

After a man has attained *samadhi* all his actions drop away. All devotional activities, such as worship, *japa*, and the like, as well as all worldly duties, cease to exist for such a person. ... After attaining *samadhi*, I once went to the Ganges to perform *tarpan*. But as I took water in the palm of my hand, it trickled down through my fingers. Weeping, I said to Haladhari, 'Cousin, what is this?' Haladhari replied, 'It is called *galitahasta* [inert and benumbed hand] in the holy books.' After the vision of God, such duties as the performance of *tarpan* drop away.⁵⁴

Thus, besides protecting one from the harm arising out of their non-performance, *nitya*, regular and *naimittika*, special, actions cannot be taken in conjunction with the knowledge of Brahman and cannot be considered as a means of liberation. In fact, these actions give the results of attaining various worlds, like the *pitṛloka*, world of manes. They result in the creation of new bodies necessary for enjoying these worlds, thereby making liberation impossible. The next verse depicts this and explains the means of attaining the knowledge of Brahman.

(To be continued)

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51. *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 1.4.9.
52. *Isha Upanishad*, 11.
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REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



American Veda

Philip Goldberg

Harmony Books, Random House,
1745 Broadway, New York 10019.
Website: www.crownpublishing.com.
2010. xiv + 398 pp. US\$ 26.

The great sage Veda Vyasa classified the mass of Vedic literature into four Vedas in order to systematize and protect it. The Itihasas and Puranas are considered the fifth Veda. All through India's long religious history some sects have unsuccessfully tried to push their works as a Veda—for example, Ayurveda; Dhanurveda, the science of archery; and so on. But this is the first time one comes across another claim: an American Veda. Let us clarify: the Americans are not trying to write any new scripture, neither are they becoming Hindus. The title is significant because, as the author points out, a large and influential section of the world is subscribing to a view that has been articulated in the Rig Veda: 'Truth is one, sages call it by many names.' And the subtitle of the book summarizes the temporal and spatial context in which this view has taken roots: 'From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation: How Indian Spirituality Changed the West.'

The author explains how ancient Indian spiritual literature has gradually percolated the American mind for more than two hundred years. It first influenced the Transcendentalists in the mid-nineteenth century; and at the close of that century Swami Vivekananda, who spent his best years preaching Vedanta in the US, brought the full force of yoga and Vedanta through his powerful personality. Thereafter, Vedanta Societies and Paramahansa Yogananda created in the US a deep appreciation for Indian philosophy. In the 1960s came the so-called 'counterculture', through which a wide interest in Eastern religions and spirituality arose first in the US and then in the whole

West. This period saw a large number of gurus successfully preaching to large audiences, especially young people. These gurus mainly presented Upanishadic metaphysics and yogic techniques. Swamiji says of Indian spirituality: 'If there is one word in the English language to represent the gift of India to the world, if there is one word in the English language to express the effect which the literature of India produces upon mankind, it is this one word, "fascination". It is the opposite of anything that takes you suddenly; it throws on you, as it were, a charm imperceptibly.'

For thousands of years the Indian subcontinent has attracted spiritual seekers, scholars, merchants, artisans, adventurers, raiders, and people of all types. This traffic was never one way; India too spread its knowledge to the world through many of these channels. This movement of people and ideas gave rise to many sub-countercultures that, at certain periods, had a tremendous effect on Indian society—one major counterculture was Buddhism, which was to influence almost the whole of Asia. The author of *American Veda* believes that during the last two centuries one such counterculture of Vedic values has enormously influenced the shaping of American consciousness by broadening ideas of body, mind, spirit, and each individual's place in the infinite cosmos.

In contrast, India is at the present experiencing a counterculture of materialism, which is probably acting as a counterweight to the spiritual renaissance started by Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji and which, instead of hampering the new spirituality, will bring India to the material level of other nations, a development that will help spread Indian spirituality even further.

Philip Goldberg has been deeply influenced by Hinduism since the late 1960s and has practised meditation and yoga for decades. He is an ordained interfaith minister and a public speaker with as many as nineteen books to his credit. He

is also the founder of Spiritual Wellness and Healing Associates. *American Veda* has been written from a journalist's perspective and not as an academic treatise. He writes: 'The book is not just a chronicle of the gurus, swamis, and Yoga masters who have come to our shores, but an account of a much larger phenomena: a religious revolution whose impact is likely to endure' (5).

Another important feature of Goldberg's historical, social, psychological, and spiritual recount is that he considers not only the positive but also the negative side of this counterculture in the West—the faults of several Indian gurus who operated in America during this period are told with unusual fidelity. The author also documents the many practitioners of yoga who came to India, spent years training in some ashramas, and went back to influence their country.

Goldberg has lucidly documented all the gurus and swamis, big or small, who preached and popularized yoga and Vedanta in the West. He has met most of them personally and interviewed some of the contemporary ones. He also documents the various intellectuals who were at the forefront of this movement and positively helped spread yoga and Vedanta through literature, lectures, and seminars. Today Hinduism has been reconstructed within US culture by keeping in mind the needs of the American people. Goldberg explains that this reconstruction 'describes a major shift in consciousness; of how practices we've imported from India are changing the way we understand ourselves and our place in the universe' (6).

Yoga is a billion-dollar industry in the West, and the spread of yoga-studios, catering to purely health needs and the reduction of stress, is amazing. But along with this commercialization, the awareness of yoga's deeper roots is also dawning.

The author also mentions two more new trends in some Western countries: first, the increasing number of women gurus from India and American gurus of both sexes preaching to varied audiences, and second the demystification of the guru cult and the more democratic and less authoritarian approach of gurus towards people. Besides, the introduction of service work, some elements of bhakti, and the teaching of spiritualizing life is attracting more people.

The old days of distancing oneself from what is inferior, which is defined mainly by culture, race, and economics is dying away. Enlightened people everywhere are receptive to noble ideas beyond their usual horizons and are working them out in their lives. This speaks of remarkable human progress.

Thousands of lives in the US have been transformed and their inner spiritual needs have been quenched at the perennial fount of world's ancient wisdom. Yoga and Vedanta as well as other imports like Buddhism, are creating one more revolution in the human consciousness, and even the scientific community is looking to Eastern spirituality to do research in fields that range from psychology to neurology and mental health. Many theories of modern physics also are finding echoes in Vedantic doctrines. The plaza outside the headquarters of the European Organization for Nuclear Research in Geneva, Switzerland, has the statue of Shiva as Nataraja; Shiva's dance depicts creation, preservation, and destruction and mystically speaks of what is going on in the Large Hadron Collider—religion and science, which have constantly fought for millennia, are now coming closer and closer. Gradually, the divide between the East and the West is blurring to such an extent that humanity will live up to its common roots, its true divine nature.

Rich in detail and extensive in scope *American Veda* is not just the historical record of the impact of Indian spirituality in the West, it is the record of India's spiritual renaissance as well.

PB

BOOK RECEIVED



Remembering Ramakrishna: His Words

Vedanta Press, 1946 Vedanta Place,
Hollywood, CA 90068. Website:
www.vedanta.com. 2009. 96 pp.
US \$ 9.95.

This slim volume is a careful selection of Sri Ramakrishna's sayings arranged in an almost poem-like form, which makes it particularly charming and easy to read.

REPORTS

Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda

Concert at New York

The Chief Educational Officers of Dharmapuri and Namakkal districts in Tamil Nadu have issued orders to all government schools in their districts to conduct Swami Vivekananda literary competitions throughout the centenary year, and the Chief Educational Officer of Krishnagiri district in Tamil Nadu has issued orders to conduct value education classes in all government schools in the district.

Frankfurt (Germany) centre conducted the following events in its retreat house at Bindweide: (i) A four-day residential summer camp from 16 to 19 August, in which some 40 friends and devotees participated; (ii) the maiden conference of the heads of Ramakrishna Order's European centres on 21 August—Swami Shivamayyananda also attended the conference.

In the first phase of the celebrations, **Malaysia** centre conducted 150 'Arise, Awake' programmes based on Swamiji's life and message at different places in Malaysia—97 in schools and other educational institutions, benefitting 9,000 students, and the remaining 53 for 4,000 adults.

At the initiative of the **Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York** (USA), the Thousand Island Park Corporation has proclaimed on 28 July that 'the place along the shore, near the easterly corner made by St Lawrence Avenue and East Coast Avenue, and overlooking the beautiful St Lawrence River will henceforth be known as "Vivekananda Landing"'. The centre organized a number of programmes at

Thousand Island Park, which included a concert on 27 July, a sitar recital on 28 July, and an interfaith service and musical offerings on 29 July.

The following centres organized various programmes to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. **Bangalore:** Spiritual retreats for college students on 29 July and 5 August 2012, attended by 875 students.

Belgaum: Quiz contests in August, in which 795 students of 9 schools took part. **Bhubaneswar:** Swami Suhitananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, released 38 titles on value education in Odia language under 'Value Education Programme for School, College, and University Students'.

Chengalpattu: Processions, bhajans, and film shows on Swamiji at Kulathur, Jamine-Pudyr, Vilanganur, Minnal-Chithamur, Amanampakkam, Indalur, and Karikkanthangal on 4, 5, 8, 11, 12, 18, and 19 August respectively.

Cherrapunji: Value education workshop on 10 August, in which 45 teachers from 18 schools participated. **Itanagar:** Seminars on 26 and 28 July and 2 and 3 August, in which nearly 950 students took part.

Kanchipuram: Talks on Swamiji's life and message in 2 colleges and 10 schools in July and August, attended by nearly 4,800 students and 150 teachers. **Limbdi:** Talks on Swamiji's life and message in 4 educational institutions between 27 July and 25 August, attended by nearly 3,600 students in all.

Mangalore: Value education programmes on

22 and 23 August, in which about 1,300 youths participated. **Rahara:** Youth conventions on 14 and 16 August, attended by nearly 1,000 students; speeches on India and Swami Vivekananda on 15 August, attended by about 900 people. **Rajkot:** Eighteen talks, mostly in educational institutions, in July and August, attended by nearly 3,500 persons. **Ranchi Morabadi:** Cultural competitions on Swamiji's life and message between 29 July and 21 August, in which about 1,600 students from 3 blocks in Ranchi district participated. **Salem:** Cultural competitions from 21 to 28 August, in which 1,754 students took part. **Shillong:** Cultural competitions in July and August, in which about 2,200 students from 75 institutes participated—Sri Bindoo M Lanong, deputy chief minister of Meghalaya, handed over the prizes to the winners on 11 August. Also Dr Mukul Sangma, chief minister of Meghalaya, inaugurated Vivekananda Centre for Youth Counselling at the ashrama's Vivekananda Cultural Centre on 18 August. **Swamiji's Ancestral House:** Vocal recital of Indian classical music on 30 July, attended by 450 people. On the initiative of the centre, 4 institutions organized talks on Swamiji at different places in Kolkata in August—about 2,700 people attended the programmes. **Thiruvananthapuram:** On 14 August Mr Oommen Chandy, chief minister of Kerala, inaugurated the Thiruvananthapuram centre's state level celebrations sponsored by the Government of Kerala; Mr V S Sivakumar, health minister of Kerala, launched the website for these celebrations. **Vadodara:** Seminars on value education for principals and teachers of schools on 21 and 22 August. **Vishakhapatnam:** A seminar on 'Swami Vivekananda's Message to the Youth' on 19 August, attended by 130 youths.

Several centres released books on Swami Vivekananda's life and message. On 1 September

2 new books on Swami Vivekananda's life and teachings—one in Hindi and two in English—4 highly subsidized books in English on Swamiji's teachings, and 130 subsidized books on value education, all published by **Advaita Ashrama**, were released by Justice Ashok Kumar Ganguly, retired judge of Supreme Court of India and chairperson of the Human Rights Commission, West Bengal, at Ramakrishna Mission Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House and Cultural Centre, Kolkata; Swami Suhitananda presided over the function and Swami Suvirananda, Assistant Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, was the special guest. Sri R S Mooshahary, governor of Meghalaya, released 4 books—one each in Assamese, Garo, Hajong, and Khasi—at **Cherrapunji** centre on 28 August; he also addressed a gathering of more than 1,000 people, comprising mostly of students and teachers. At **Delhi** centre Prof Kiran Walia, minister for social welfare, government of National Capital Region of Delhi, released ten books—one each in Adi, Kokborok, Konkani, Maithili, Manipuri, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santhali, Tulu, and Urdu—on 12 August; the programme was followed by a vocal recital by an eminent artiste. At **Mumbai** centre Sri K Sankaranarayanan, governor of Maharashtra, released a few books in Hindi and Marathi on 20 August; Swami Suhitananda presided over the programme.

New Mission Centre

We are glad to announce that a branch centre of the Ramakrishna Mission has been started at the house of Balaram Bose at Kothar, where Holy Mother stayed for 66 days. Shree Maa Sarada Devi Smruty Samity, Kothar, which had been maintaining the house for the last several years, handed it over to the Ramakrishna Mission in a function held on 9 August, Krishna Janmashtami Day. The address of the centre is Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, PO

Kothar, Dist. Bhadrak, Odisha 756 118; phone: (o) 94383 74718; e-mail: rkmkothar@gmail.com.

News from Branch Centres

Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur Math, held its seventh foundation anniversary celebration and the annual convocation at its Belur campus on 4 July. Ms Mamata Banerjee, chief minister of West Bengal, was the guest-in-chief and delivered the convocation address. As a special gesture she offered a grant of one crore rupees for the development of the university. Sri Bratya Basu, minister for higher education of West Bengal, was the special guest of honour. Swami Suhitananda, who is also the chancellor of the university, presided over the meeting and gave away certificates, degrees, and diplomas to the students who successfully graduated from the Belur and Narendrapur faculties. The chief minister gave away prizes to the toppers. Besides, two of the Sanskrit students of the university successfully cleared the University Grants Commission National Eligibility Test for Junior Research Fellowship in 'Sanskrit Traditional Subjects'.

Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, celebrated the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Ramakrishnananda from 15 to 17 July through various programmes such as retreats, seminars, discourses, and devotional music. Swami Suhitananda inaugurated the newly built 'Ramakrishnananda Mandapam' and released a commemorative volume. He also launched e-books and e-books app for mobile devices and tablets, and a new e-book store website: <www.vedantaebooks.org>. Besides, a 'Ramakrishnananda Exhibition' and a new bookstall were inaugurated, while nine books on Swami Ramakrishnananda and a DVD containing the 92-year archives of *Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam*, the Tamil journal of the Ramakrishna Order, were released.

The Vivekananda Centenary Girls' Higher Secondary School of **Ramakrishna Math, Chennai**, celebrated its golden jubilee from 20 to 22 July through various programmes such as a procession, speeches, devotional music, cultural programmes, exhibitions, and a film show on Swami Vivekananda.

The Academy for Competitive Exams set up at **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore**, to coach students for job-oriented competitive examinations was inaugurated on 22 July.

Two new buildings, namely Boys' Home Study Hall and Sri Sarada Nursery School Building, at **Ramakrishna Mission, Batticaloa**, a sub-centre of **Ramakrishna Mission, Colombo**, were inaugurated on 25 July.

In Bangladesh Swami Suhitananda laid the foundation stone for the proposed Durga Mandapa at **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Dinajpur**, on 27 July; inaugurated the newly constructed monks' quarters and dispensary building at **Ramakrishna Ashrama and Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Baliati**, on 29 July; laid the foundation stone for the proposed Sri Ramakrishna Temple at **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Narayanganj**, on 29 July; and laid the foundation stone for the proposed students' home building at **Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka**, on 30 July.

A newly built polyhouse and shade-net house at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sargachhi**, were inaugurated on 10 August.

The renovated Vivekananda Auditorium at **Ramakrishna Mission, Delhi**, was inaugurated on 12 August.

Swami Suhitananda inaugurated the newly built Nivedita Bhawan, comprising classrooms for the Primary Teachers' Training Institute at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sarisha**, on 14 August.

Swami Suhitananda declared open the Swami Vivekananda Sabhagriha, auditorium, at the



Release of audiobook at the Institute of Culture

school of **Ramakrishna Math, Kamarpukur**, on 17 August.

Sri Ramakrishna Darshanam, the first ever Tamil feature film on Sri Ramakrishna, produced by GND Vision International (P) Limited, was released and screened on 17 August at **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalyaya, Coimbatore**.


The newly constructed dispensary building at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Malda**, was inaugurated on 30 August.

An audiobook containing readings from the 'Chicago Addresses' of Swami Vivekananda, produced by **Advaita Ashrama**, in collaboration with Saregama India, was released by Swami Puratmananda, Secretary, Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House and Cultural Centre, Kolkata, on 8 September in the Vivekananda Hall of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata.

Relief

Distress Relief • The following centres distributed various items to needy people. **Baghbazar**: 200 saris through **Gourhati** centre, 200 lungis and 100 saris through **Naora** centre, medicines and nutritious diet to 7 poor patients, and textbooks to 10

needy students; besides, the centre gave 4,082 meals to poor persons during the last 4 months; **Bangalore**: 500 notebooks, 100 school bags, and 30 geometry boxes; **Garbeta**: 50 saris and 50 lungis on 17 August; **Nagpur**: 1,110 school uniforms, 3,250 notebooks, and 1,080 pens to students of 23 schools in 18 villages of Nagpur district from 16 July to 3 August; **Naora**: 400 children's garments and 100 saris on 16 and 17 August; **Vrindaban**: 92 tumblers, 70 buckets, 80 plates, 42 trunks, 22 bags, 11 cans, 71 LPG cylinders with stoves, 179 cooking vessels, including 109 pressure cookers, among 303 poor widows of Vrindaban from 7 to 11 August.

Flood Relief • **Itanagar** centre continued its flood relief work in Assam by distributing 14,100 kg rice, 4,230 kg dal, 4,230 kg potatoes, 1,410 kg soybean, 705 l mustard oil, 1,410 kg salt, 1,410 kg chira, 353 kg sugar, 5,640 packets of biscuits, 282 kg detergent powder, 2,820 candles, and 14,100 matchboxes among 1,410 flood-affected families in 29 villages of Dhemaji district from 25 July to 4 August. **Guwahati** centre distributed 55 dhotis, 60 saris, and 20 kg protein powder among 215 flood-affected people in Yogijan area of Nagaon district. **Silchar** centre conducted medical camps in Barkhola, Silchar, Udharban, and Sonai areas of Cachar district. Nearly 400,000 halogen tablets were distributed among 4,000 families in the above areas. **Indore** centre started relief operation following a heavy rainfall and release of water by dams that caused heavy floods in and around Omkareshwar in Khandwa district, affecting many poor families; the centre distributed 300 blankets, 300 saris, 150 pyjamas, 150 shirts, and 117 water-filters among 150 flood-affected families on 31 August. **Dehradun** centre started relief activities following recent flash floods caused by sudden cloud bursts that affected thousands of families and endangered many lives; it distributed 7,310 kg rice, 2,924 kg dal, 731 l mustard oil, 365 kg spices, 439 kg salt, 5,848 packets of biscuits, 439 kg milk powder, 365 kg tea leaves, 1,462 kg gur, 360 sweaters, 100 mattresses, 1,000 blankets, 8,772 matchboxes, and 8,772 candles among 1,462 flood-affected families in 11 villages of Uttarkashi district. **Nadi** (Fiji) centre continued its flood relief work distributing varieties of high-quality imported vegetable seeds among 3,515 farmers in 6 districts. 

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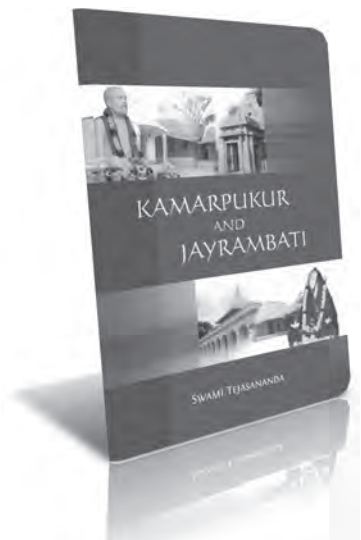
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A TEMPLE OF PEACE

By the grace of the Holy Trio, the Universal Temple of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna at Kadapa is nearing completion, Though initially the cost was estimated at ₹ 140 lakh, now we have to spend an additional ₹ 20 lakh to complete it. It has been decided to perform the consecration of the temple along with installation of the marble image of Sri Ramakrishna on Thursday, 22nd November 2012 (the sacred Jagaddhatri Puja Day). In this connection a four-day programme will be held from 20th to 23rd November. We welcome all the devotees and admirers of Sri Ramakrishna to the celebrations.

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice President of Ramakrishna Order has kindly agreed to perform the consecration ceremony. We expect about 250 sadhus and brahmacharis and around 5000 devotees (2000 from outside Kadapa) for the function which would include Vastu Homa, Special Pujas, bhajans, and cultural programmes, processions of sadhus and devotees, discourses by monks and eminent persons, and the publication of a souvenir. The estimated cost of these celebrations is ₹ 45 lakh, We appeal to all the devotees and admirers to generously contribute towards this noble event and make it a grand and memorable occasion.

Your contributions through Cheques or DDs drawn in favour of Ramakrishna Mission, Kadapa, payable at Cuddapah (old spelling still in use in banks!) may be sent to the above address. You can also use the E-transfer facility to remit to our bank account. Details for bank transfer are: Ramakrishna Mission A/c No 30186936408, State Bank of India RIMS Branch, Cuddapah Bank code: SBIN 0010107. Please intimate us the donor's name and address soon after the e-transfer is complete for reconciliation and issue of the receipt by us.

Swami Atmavidananda
Secretary

